Supreme Court, U.S.
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No. 01-

IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

BETTY WILLINGHAM,

Petitioner,

v.

JAMES LOUGHNAN and BRIAN BEUCLER,

Respondents.

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT

PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED FOR REVIEW

In *Hope v. Pelzer*, Case No: 01-309 (U.S., argued April 17. 2002), 122 S. Ct. 802 (2002), this Court granted certiorari with respect to the issue of whether entitlement to qualified immunity can only be "clearly established" by a case presenting facts which are "materially similar" to those in plaintiff's case. This issue is directly on point with one of the issues in the instant case.

1. Whether state officials sued in their individual capacities under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 are entitled to qualified immunity unless they have violated statutory or constitutional rights "clearly established" by a case presenting facts "materially similar" to those in the plaintiff's case.

2. Whether an interlocutory appellate decision rejecting a government official's claim to qualified immunity following a denial of his motion for summary judgment constitutes the "law of the case" and thereby precludes a subsequent (and different) appellate panel following final judgment from awarding that official qualified immunity?

3. Whether the law-of-the-case doctrine is necessarily inconsistent with the law of qualified immunity, so that a second appellate panel is always free, following a final adverse judgment, to award qualified immunity to a government official?

PARTIES TO THE PROCEEDINGS BELOW

The Petitioner in this Court, Betty Willingham, was the plaintiff in the District Court. Willingham was also an appellee and cross-appellant in the Court of Appeals. The Respondents, James Loughnan and Brian Beucler, were defendants in the District Court. They were also appellants in the Court of Appeals. The City of Boynton Beach was a defendant in the District Court and was an appellee in the Court of Appeals. Petitioner, however, does not challenge the District Court's and Eleventh Circuit's rulings in favor of the City.

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PETITION FOR WRIT OF CERTIORARI

Petitioner, Betty Willingham, respectfully petitions the Court for a writ of certiorari to review the final judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.

OPINIONS BELOW

The opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit (Edmondson, Black and McKay), awarding Respondents qualified immunity, is reported at 261 F.3d 1178 (11th Cir. 2001) and included as Appendix A. The opinion of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida (Ungaro-Benages, J.), denying Respondents' Motion for Summary Judgment based on qualified immunity, is unreported and included as Appendix B. The interlocutory opinion of the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit (Anderson, Dubina and Carnes), rejecting Respondents' claim to qualified immunity, is unreported and included as Appendix D. The opinion of the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida (Ungaro-Benages, J.), denying Respondents' Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law based on qualified immunity, is unreported and included as Appendix E.

STATEMENT OF JURISDICTION

The final judgment of the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit was entered on August 15, 2001. Petitioner's timely Petition for Rehearing En Banc was denied on February 15, 2002 and included as Appendix C. The jurisdiction of this Court is invoked pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1254(1).

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On October 7, 1987, Petitioner Betty Willingham, an African American with no criminal history, was shot eight times by the Respondents Beucler and Loughnan, two members of the Boynton Beach (Florida) Police Department, while she was standing in the doorway of her home. Respondents claimed that, at the time of the shooting, Petitioner had a knife in her hand and was lunging off the step of her home toward a fellow officer. Based on the Respondents' claim, Petitioner was charged in June 1989 with attempted first degree murder and battery on a law enforcement officer. Petitioner was convicted of attempted second degree murder and battery on a law enforcement officer.

Petitioner filed the present action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 in 1990, claiming that the eight shots fired by Respondents were excessive under the Fourth Amendment. In essence, Petitioner claimed that she did not pose a threat to the officers (or anyone else) at the time of the shooting. Respondents moved for summary judgment based upon qualified immunity and Petitioner's previous conviction in 1995. The District Court denied this motion. *See* Appendix E. Respondents interlocutory appeal to the Eleventh Circuit was unsuccessful. Instead, the Eleventh Circuit ruled in September 1997 that, under the circumstances as alleged by Petitioner, the law of excessive force was clearly established: "According to plaintiff, she was shot when she was merely standing in the doorway of her house, screaming and pulling her hair and posing no threat to anyone. If the officers fired on plaintiff even though she was posing no threat to anyone, they would have violated clearly-established law." *See* Appendix D, at 67a.

On March 23, 1998, the case was tried before a jury. On April 10, 1998, the jury returned a verdict in favor of the Willingham and against the defendant officers and City of Boynton Beach. The jury awarded her $5,000,000.00 in compensatory, and $500,000.00 in punitive, damages. The District Court thereafter granted the City's motion for judgment as a matter of law, but rejected Respondents motion for judgment as a matter of law based on qualified immunity. *See* Appendix B. Respondents again appealed the District Court's rejection of their claim to qualified immunity.[1]

On August 15, 2001, the Eleventh Circuit reversed in part and affirmed in part. *Willingham v. Loughnan*, 261 F.3d 1178 (11th Cir. 2001). Notwithstanding its conclusion that

> the law would allow a reasonable jury to find – given the Plaintiff's evidence, including evidence of Plaintiff being unarmed when shot, of the nature of the weapons she had used and the manner of their use, of the number of police officers present and their location and so on – that the amount of force applied by the Defendant Officers was not reasonable in this case, notwithstanding that Plaintiff had just finished battering and attempting to kill police officers.

Id. at 1186, the Eleventh Circuit concluded that "[t]he Officer Defendants were entitled to qualified immunity under the facts supported by the evidence at the civil trial (taken most favorably to Plaintiff) but limited by the facts earlier determined conclusively by the criminal-trial court." *Id.* at 1184.

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1. Petitioner cross-appealed the judgment as a matter of law entered in favor of the City. Petitioner does not seek review of the Eleventh Circuit's decision affirming that judgment in this Court.

The Eleventh Circuit premised its qualified immunity analysis on whether "a materially similar case . . . already decided that what the police officer was doing was unlawful." *Id.* at 1887. Because "Plaintiff presents no earlier cases that would establish that the Officer Defendants' acts, under the circumstances, were clearly illegal at the time of this incident," *id.*, it awarded the officers qualified immunity. Missing from the court's analysis was any mention of whether the prior interlocutory decision of the Eleventh Circuit, which concluded that "[i]f the officers fired on plaintiff even though she was posing no threat to anyone, they would have violated clearly-established law," *see* Appendix D, at 67a, was controlling or entitled to deference. Instead, the Eleventh Circuit assumed that qualified immunity draws *de novo* consideration irrespective of doctrines such as law-of-the-case.

REASONS FOR GRANTING THE WRIT

I. The Eleventh Circuit's "materially similar" standard, which is premised on the existence of previously-decided, virtually identical cases, contradicts this Court's fair warning standard and the approaches of several other Circuits.

The Court of Appeals held that

> [a]lmost always, to establish the law clearly in the context of the Fourth Amendment, a materially similar case must have already decided that what the police officer was doing was unlawful. . . . Plaintiff presents no earlier cases that would establish that the Officer Defendants' acts, under the circumstances, were clearly illegal at the time

> of the incident. Our own survey of the case law indicates that in 1987 it was not clearly established that it constituted excessive force to shoot a person under the circumstances presented in this case.

261 F.3d at 1187. Application of this immunity rule in the Eleventh Circuit means that "only in exceptional cases will government actors have no shield against claims made against them. . . ." *Lassiter v. Alabama University Board of Trustees*, 28 F.3d 1146, 1149 (11th Cir. 1994) (en banc). *See also Jenkins v. Talladega City Bd. of Educ.*, 115 F.3d 821, 825 n.3 (11th Cir. 1997); *Gonzalez v. Lee Cty. Housing Auth.*, 161 F.3d 1290, 1295 (11th Cir. 1998). Under the standard promulgated by the Eleventh Circuit, "[f]or qualified immunity to be surrendered, pre-existing law must dictate, that is, truly compel (not just suggest or allow or raise a question about), the conclusion for every like-situated, reasonable government agent that what defendant is doing violates federal law in the circumstances." *Rowe v. City of Fort Lauderdale*, 279 F.3d 1271 (11th Cir. 2002) (quoting *Lassiter*, 28 F.3d at 1150). Even arguable differences in minor facts are enough to defeat liability. *Marsh v. Butler*, 268 F.3d 1014, 1032 (11th Cir. 2001). Consequently, patent wrongs are insulated by minor factual distinctions. *See Lewis v. McDade*, 250 F.3d 1320 (11th Cir. 2001) (Barkett, J., dissenting from denial of rehearing en banc). Only where there is a pre-existing, "factually defined" case which is precisely on point can a litigant survive the defense of qualified immunity before the Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.

This Court has stated that

> [t]he relevant dispositive inquiry in determining whether a right is clearly established [for purposes of qualified immunity] is whether it would be clear to a reasonable officer that his conduct was unlawful in the situation he confronted.

Saucier v. Katz, 121 S. Ct. 2151, 2156 (2001). Because the concern, with respect to the qualified immunity defense, is to acknowledge reasonable mistakes, the ultimate question is whether "the officer's mistake as to what the law requires is reasonable." *Id.* at 2158. And as this Court made clear in *United States v. Lanier*, 520 U.S. 259, 271 (1997), the reasonableness of mistakes is primarily a function of "fair warning," not factual identity.

Faced with the reprehensible conduct of a state court judge, conduct so vile and aberrational that it had never been discussed in a prior case, the *Lanier* Court concluded that due process was served by general statements about what the Constitution prohibited:

> [G]eneral statements of the law are not inherently incapable of giving fair and clear warning [to the Defendants], and in other instances a general constitutional rule already identified in the decisional law may apply with obvious clarity to the specified conduct in question, even though 'the very action in question has [not] previously been held unlawful.'

Id. (quoting from *Anderson v. Creighton*, 483 U.S. 635, 640 (1987)). *Lanier* drew a direct equation between due process and qualified immunity:

> the qualified immunity test is simply the adaptation of the fair warning standard to give officials (and, ultimately, governments) the same protection from civil liability and its consequences that individuals have traditionally possessed in the face of vague criminal statutes. To require something clearer than 'clearly established' would, then, call for something beyond 'fair warning.'

Lanier, 520 U.S. at 270-71.

The Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit, by requiring that a civil rights plaintiff show the existence of a prior decision involving virtually identical facts in order to recover damages for a constitutional wrong, has effectively converted qualified immunity into absolute immunity. The instant case provides an additional opportunity to clarify the law with respect to the proper use of the qualified immunity defense. Because a number of Circuits have rejected the need for such identical facts, *see, e.g.*, *Ayani v. Mottola*, 35 F.3d 680 (2d Cir. 1994); *Buonocore v. Harris*, 65 F.3d 347 (4th Cir. 1995); *Brokaw v. Mercer County*, 235 F.3d 1000 (7th Cir. 2000), this Court granted certiorari to address whether the Eleventh Circuit's position is sound in *Hope v. Pelzer*, No. 01-309 (U.S., argued April 17. 2002). *See* 122 S. Ct. 802 (2002). The Eleventh Circuit in *Hope v. Pelzer*, 240 F.3d 975 (11th Cir. 2001), found no previously-decided and materially similar case and thus awarded qualified immunity to prison guards who used a "hitching post" to restrain an inmate. This Court granted review to decide "[w]hether state officials sued in their individual capacities under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 are entitled to qualified immunity unless they have violated statutory or

constitutional rights 'clearly established' by a case presenting facts 'materially similar' to those in the plaintiff's case." 122 S. Ct. 802. Similarly, the Court should grant review here in order to decide whether the Eleventh Circuit's analysis of qualified immunity was proper.

II The Eleventh Circuit's rejection of the law-of-the-case doctrine in the specific context of qualified immunity conflicts with decisions of its Sister Circuits.

The law-of-the-case doctrine generally protects judicial findings of fact and law from subsequent review by the same court. "Under this doctrine, a court should not reopen issues decided in earlier stages of the same litigation." *Aguilar v. Agostini*, 521 U.S. 203, 236 (1997) (citing *Messenger v. Anderson*, 225 U.S. 436 (1912)). The doctrine does not apply if the court is "convinced that [its prior decision] is clearly erroneous and would work a manifest injustice," *Arizona v. California*, 460 U.S. 605, 618, n.8 (1983), "although as a rule courts should be loathe to do so in the absence of extraordinary circumstances. . . ." *Christianson v. Colt Industries Operating Corp.*, 486 U.S. 800, 817 (1988). *See generally* 18B C. WRIGHT, A. MILLER & E. COOPER, FEDERAL PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE § 4478 (2002) ("The standards announced for departing from the law of the case commonly demand strong justification.").

A case involving multiple appeals presents the ideal model for applying the law-of-the-case doctrine. Multiple appeals often draw different collections of judges to the same legal and factual problems. In the absence of the law-of-the-case doctrine, a subsequent (and likely different) appellate panel would be free to second-guess the findings and holdings of prior panels. This would not only prove

grossly inefficient, it would reflect a lack of comity between and respect for judges sitting on the same court. The better and common practice – that is reflected in the law-of-the-case doctrine – is for subsequent appellate panels to defer to the findings and holdings of prior panels. Their rulings, right or wrong, become the "law of the case."

Lower courts have had little difficulty applying the law-of-the-case doctrine to insulate government officials from liability. A prior appellate panel's award of qualified immunity is routinely respected under the law-of-the-case doctrine by a subsequent appellate panel. *See, e.g., Tonkovich v. Kansas Board of Regents*, 254 F.3d 941 (10th Cir. 2001) (finding that prior appellate award of qualified immunity represents the law of the case); *Veneklase v. City of Fargo*, 248 F.3d 738 (8th Cir. 2001) (same).

Lower court judges, however, have struggled with the law-of-the-case doctrine when a prior panel has ruled against qualified immunity. On one hand, the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia (over one dissent), Third and Sixth Circuits have concluded that generally applicable law-of-the-case principles apply to prior rejections of qualified immunity. *See, e.g., Kimberlin v. Quinlan*, 199 F.3d 496, 500-02 (D.C. Cir. 2000) (holding that prior rejection of qualified immunity by district court, affirmed on appeal, reflected the "law of the case"); *In re City of Philadelphia*, 158 F.3d 711 (3d Cir. 1998); *McCloud v. Testa*, 97 F.3d 1536, 1562 (6th Cir. 1996) ("It is also the law of the case that Testa's argument that he is entitled to qualified immunity because the plaintiffs were affiliated with a non-ideological faction within the same political party has been rejected."). The Eleventh Circuit, on the other hand, has consistently refused to apply the law-of-the-case doctrine

to prior rejections of qualified immunity. In *Oladeinde v. City of Birmingham*, 230 F.3d 1275 (11th Cir. 2000), for example, the court refused to recognize *two* prior panel decisions rejecting qualified immunity as the law of the case. The first followed an interlocutory appeal from a denial of the defendants' Rule 12(b)(6) motion. The second followed an interlocutory appeal from the District Court's denial of defendants' motion for summary judgment. Neither panel decision, according to the Eleventh Circuit, represented the law of the case.

Judge Tjoflat frankly explained the Eleventh Circuit's aversion to the law-of-the-case doctrine in a dissenting opinion (from denial of rehearing en banc) in *Riley v. Camp*, 130 F.3d 958 (11th Cir. 1997). There, the second appellate panel to address qualified immunity found that a prior panel's rejection of the defense was the law of the case. Judge Tjoflat complained that "the doctrine of law of the case drastically undermines the important defense of qualified immunity, which shields many public employees, including social workers, from the expense of unwarranted litigation." *Id.* at 959. Citing to *Behrens v. Pelletier*, 516 U.S. 299 (1996), Judge Tjoflat argued that "Supreme Court and circuit precedent specifically envision this type of successive appeal in cases involving qualified immunity." 130 F.3d at 959.

> If law of the case bars reconsideration of the qualified immunity defense whenever the plaintiff wins at trial, however, then courts of appeals would never need to reconsider the qualified immunity defense as directed by the Supreme Court in *Behrens* and our own court. . . . We would

> only have occasion to reconsider the qualified immunity defense when the jury found for the defendants — meaning never.

Id. at 969.

Though Judge Tjoflat is correct in noting its relevance, he overstates the significance of *Behrens*. *Behrens* never addressed the law-of-the-case doctrine and did not imply that it was inapplicable in the context of qualified immunity. This Court, in *Behrens*, simply ruled that the Courts of Appeals have *jurisdiction* to hear multiple interlocutory appeals involving qualified immunity. *See Kimberlin*, 199 F.3d at 501 ("*Behrens* certainly does not say that the traditional law-of-the-case doctrine is inapplicable to cases involving claims of qualified immunity."). Moreover, because *Behrens* involved a second *interlocutory* appeal, it is questionable whether its reasoning has any application at all to an appeal, like that in *Riley* and in the present case, from a *final judgment* in favor of the plaintiff. (The first interlocutory appeal in *Behrens* was from a denial of a motion to dismiss. The second was from a denial of summary judgment.) This distinction was recognized by the District of Columbia Court of Appeals in *Kimberlin*, 199 F.3d at 501: "At that earlier stage, it is the defendant's conduct, *as alleged in the complaint* that is scrutinized for 'objective legal reasonableness'." (Quoting *Behrens*, 516 U.S. at 309 (emphasis original). "On this analysis, the defendant in *Behrens* did not waive any arguments in his first appeal, so the situation in that case did not call into play the law-of-the-case doctrine." 199 F.3d at 501. The District of Columbia Court of Appeals thus rejected the argument that "the law-of-the-case doctrine is inapplicable to qualified immunity appeals." *Id.*

In the case at hand, the Eleventh Circuit observed that a prior panel "in an unpublished opinion – affirmed the denial of qualified immunity on interlocutory appeal [from a denial of summary judgment] in September 1997." *Willingham*, *supra* at 1180. Remarkably, it failed to even mention whether this prior panel's conclusion might constitute the "law of the case." Instead, consistent with its practice, *see Riley*, *supra* (Tjoflat, J., dissenting from denial of rehearing en banc) (stating that circuit precedent precludes relying on the law-of-the-case doctrine to insulate rejections of qualified immunity) and *Oladeinde*, *supra* (holding that prior panel's rejection of qualified immunity was not the "law of the case"), it apparently assumed that the law-of-the-case doctrine is not applicable to qualified immunity. Because this conclusion conflicts with decisions of the United States Courts of Appeals for the District of Columbia, the Third and Sixth Circuits, this Court should grant the petition for writ of certiorari and hear this case.[2]

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2. The refusal of the first appellate panel in this case to heed Respondents' claim of issue preclusion does not alter the obvious relevance of the law-of-the-case doctrine. First, as explained by that panel, the Respondents' were responsible for not properly preserving the matter. *See* Appendix D, at 67a ("the [Respondents] did not present the criminal trial transcript to the district court in support of their motion for summary judgment, nor did they include said transcript in the record on appeal."). They thus waived using issue preclusion as a means of supporting their claim to qualified immunity. *See Kimberlin*, 199 F.3d at 500

> a 'legal decision made at one stage of litigation, unchallenged in a subsequent appeal when the opportunity to do so existed, becomes the law of the case for future stages of the same litigation, and the parties are deemed to have waived the right to challenge that decision at a later time'.

(Cont'd)

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons, Petitioner respectfully requests that the Court grant certiorari or hold pending the decision in *Hope v. Pelzer* to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.

Respectfully submitted,

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(Cont'd)
Second, assuming it was not waived by Respondents in the first appeal, the question that ought to have been addressed by the second panel is whether the preclusive effect of Petitioner's criminal conviction – not considered in the first appeal – amounted to "extraordinary circumstances" and thereby justified dispensing with the law of the case. *See Christianson, supra* at 817. *See generally* 18B C. WRIGHT, A. MILLER & E. COOPER, FEDERAL PRACTICE AND PROCEDURE § 4478 (2002) ("The standards announced for departing from the law of the case commonly demand strong justification.").

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A — OPINION OF THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT DATED AND FILED AUGUST 15, 2001

UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT

No. 99-4005

D.C. Docket No. 90-08156-CV-UUB

BETTY WILLINGHAM,

Plaintiff-Appellee-Cross-Appellant,

versus

JAMES LOUGHNAN, BRIAN BEUCLER,

Defendants-Appellants-Cross-Appellees.

Appeals from the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida

(August 15, 2001)

Before EDMONDSON, BLACK and McKAY*, Circuit Judges.

EDMONDSON, Circuit Judge:

This case is mainly about qualified immunity and the deference afforded the findings of fact implicit in a general

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* Honorable Monroe G. McKay, United States Circuit Judge for the Tenth Circuit, sitting by designation.

jury verdict in favor of Plaintiff in a section 1983 suit, considering Plaintiff's earlier criminal conviction related to the same events that are the subject of the section 1983 suit. The Officer Defendants in their individual capacities appeal the district court's denial of their Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law and their Motion for Remittitur. Plaintiff cross-appeals the district court's grant of the City's post-trial motion for judgment.

The Officer Defendants first argue that Plaintiff was precluded from asserting a claim for a Fourth Amendment violation because of her conviction for attempted second degree murder of a police officer during the incident in question. They next argue that Plaintiff lacked a cognizable section 1983 claim because of the rule established in *Heck v. Humphrey*, 114 S.Ct. 2364 (1994). The Officer Defendants argue, most substantively, that they are entitled to qualified immunity because their acts violated no clearly established law at the pertinent time.

We review the district court's decision on a Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law de novo, taking the evidence presented to the jury in the light most favorable to the non-moving party.[1] *See Stimpson v. City of Tuscaloosa*, 186 F.3d 1328, 1331 (11th Cir. 1999).

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1. In this case, materially different stories were presented to the jury by Plaintiff and Defendants. Because the jury, by general verdict, found for Plaintiff we will accept her version of events except to the extent that her testimony in this case calls into question the validity of her previous conviction for assault and attempted murder during this incident.

Appendix A

PROCEEDINGS BELOW

In October 1987, Plaintiff Betty Willingham ("Plaintiff") was shot by police officers during an incident outside of her home. Plaintiff was then convicted of attempted, second-degree murder of one of the police officers and of battery on another police officer there that night.

In 1990, Plaintiff filed suit against several defendants alleging a variety of state and federal claims. Defendants' motions for summary judgment in 1992 and 1995 were denied by the district court. The 1995 motion was denied on the grounds that material issues of fact remained in dispute which, if resolved in Plaintiff's favor, would deprive the Defendants of qualified immunity. This court — in an unpublished opinion — affirmed the denial of qualified immunity on interlocutory appeal in September 1997. *See Willingham v. Loughnan*, 124 F.3d 1299 (11th Cir. 1997)(Table).

The federal civil rights claims against Brian Beucler and James Loughnan (the "Officer Defendants") and the City of Boynton Beach (the "City") proceeded to trial.[2] The jury returned a verdict in favor of Plaintiff for $5,000,000.00 in compensatory damages against the Officer Defendants and the City, and $500,000.00 in punitive damages against each officer in his individual capacity. The Officer Defendants and the City filed motions for judgment as a matter of law, for a new trial and for remittitur. The district court granted

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2. The state law claims against the Officer Defendants and defendant police chief were voluntarily dismissed before trial.

the City's motion for judgment as a matter of law,[3] but denied the Officer Defendants' motions. The Officer Defendants now appeal the denial of their motion for judgment as a matter of law and motion for remittitur.[4] Plaintiff filed a cross-appeal of the judgment in favor of the City.

BACKGROUND

The facts in this case are disputed on many relevant details by the parties involved. The difficult question presented in this case is what findings of fact can a court determine a jury made when the jury by general verdict in the section 1983 suit found for Plaintiff — and therefore all facts and inferences supported by the evidence must be drawn favorably to Plaintiff — but, certain evidence presented in the civil case cannot (as a matter of law) be taken as fact because it contradicts findings of fact necessarily made by the earlier criminal-case jury when that jury found Plaintiff guilty — beyond a reasonable doubt — of attempted second degree murder and of battery on a police officer. We first

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3. We affirm the trial court's judgment for the City because, after our own review of the record and briefs, we agree that Plaintiff offered no evidence from which a reasonable jury could conclude that the City was on notice of the need to train or to supervise their officers better in the area of the use of force. *See Gold v. City of Miami*, 151 F.3d 1346, 1351 (11th Cir. 1998) ("[W]ithout notice of a need to train or supervise in a particular area, a municipality is not liable as a matter of law for any failure to train and supervise.")

4. The Officer Defendants make no argument on appeal that the district court erred in failing to grant them a new trial and do not request we overturn the district court's order denying them a new trial.

summarize the testimony of key witnesses to the events and will determine in our discussion of the case what facts must be taken as true because of the earlier conviction for assault and attempted murder.

Testimony of Plaintiff Betty Willingham

Plaintiff testified that she came to the door of her home on the night in question, responding to a knock on her door that woke her. When she opened the door, she saw her brother, Arnold Sims ("Sims"), near his truck and saw Officer Ronald Panucci ("Panucci") and his police dog out by the road in front of the house. Sims and Panucci were in an argument and were standing about six or seven feet from each other. While standing in the doorway, Plaintiff called other members of her family on the phone to tell them the police were harassing Sims.

Panucci then started moving toward Sims with the leashed dog. The confrontation between Panucci and Sims then became physical; Panucci said something, and the dog began to attack Sims. The dog began to bite Sims below the knee. Plaintiff found two bottles in her kitchen near the door and threw them at the dog, which was closer to her than Panucci or Sims. Although the bottles hit the dog, it would not stop biting Sims. Plaintiff then grabbed a knife in the kitchen sink and threw the knife at the dog. She said that she never had a second knife, that she never threw a glass at a police officer and that she never tried to throw anything at Panucci. Plaintiff never stepped completely out of the doorway. Plaintiff said that she saw Loughnan and another police car at some point before the shooting but did not hear anyone yelling at her.

Immediately after throwing the knife at Panucci, Plaintiff reached up to pull her hair in frustration while screaming for the dog to stop biting Sims. Just as she was reaching up, she was shot and fell back into the kitchen. Plaintiff says she was shot within a "split second" of throwing the knife.[5] After she was shot, one of the Officer Defendants told her, "If I had the opportunity, I'd shoot your ass again." Shortly thereafter, paramedics arrived and took her to the hospital.

Testimony of Officer Loughnan

Loughnan went to the scene of the pertinent events after receiving a radio call that Panucci had stopped a car and needed assistance. When Loughnan arrived, he saw that Panucci and Sims were near the house with Panucci's back to the door. The dog was at heel at Panucci's side. Plaintiff was out on the top stoop of her doorway, cursing at Panucci and telling him to leave Sims alone. Panucci and Sims were yelling at each other and then became engaged in physical struggle. Loughnan concentrated on Plaintiff because (having had some dog training in the military) he did not want to get between a dog and its target. Plaintiff then threw a bottle at Panucci, which bounced off the back of Panucci's leg or back. Loughnan then approached Plaintiff, and she threw a glass at him striking him in the shoulder.

Loughnan told Plaintiff she was under arrest. He grabbed her by her bathrobe to apprehend her. Plaintiff resisted, tearing

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5. No argument was made, nor was evidence presented that the Officer Defendants had knowledge that both were going to shoot Defendant. The evidence supports only a finding that the officers made simultaneous (but independent decisions) to shoot Plaintiff.

the garment and a necklace from her as she fled into the house and closed the door behind her. Loughnan could hear Plaintiff rummaging through drawers in the kitchen. At that point Loughnan moved away from the stoop and said he might have drawn his gun and held it by his side. Plaintiff reemerged from the house holding two knives. She threw one at Panucci that bounced off his leg or back. Loughnan began yelling repeatedly "drop the knife." Plaintiff turned and looked at Loughnan and saw the gun pointed at her. She then turned and lunged toward Panucci. Loughnan fired four bullets at Plaintiff, stopping her and spinning her around so that she fell in her doorway.[6] Loughnan was somewhere between two and six feet from Plaintiff.

Testimony of Beucler

Beucler was working with Officer Blum the night Plaintiff was shot. They went to the area where Panucci was trying to stop Sims after they heard the stop announced on the radio. They were aware at the time that Sims' truck had not stopped when directed to do so by Panucci. When Beucler and Blum arrived at the scene, a civilian car drove by and stopped. Blum approached the car to direct the occupants to move on.

Beucler was focused on Panucci and Sims. He could see that they were in an argument. The dog was sitting at Panucci's side. At some point, Beucler was close enough to the confrontation to put his hand on Sims's shoulder. Beucler

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6. Both Loughnan and Beucler fired two "double-taps" at Plaintiff. Officers are trained to fire a "double-taps" instead of a single shot. According to their training, a "double-tap" is considered one shot. No argument was made at trial or on appeal that the practice of shooting a "double-tap" itself constitutes excessive force.

saw Sims push Panucci, and Panucci respond by grabbing Sims. The dog then attacked Sims, but Beucler could not tell if the dog actually bit Sims. Beucler backed away from the struggle when the dog became involved.

While Beucler was getting involved with Sims and Panucci, he suddenly heard a voice yelling "drop the knife" several times. Beucler saw that neither Panucci nor Sims had a knife; so he looked around to where the sound was coming from and noticed, for the first time, Plaintiff on the stoop. He saw Plaintiff make a throwing motion and saw the knife kick up off the ground. But he did not see the knife hit Panucci. Beucler then saw that Plaintiff had another knife. She was moving toward Panucci's back with the knife raised. Beucler then fired four shots at Plaintiff. The shots stopped her forward motion, and she fell back into the doorway of the house.

Beucler ran up to Plaintiff to check on her condition. He saw the knife next to Plaintiff on the kitchen floor but did not touch the knife. Beucler said his total time at the scene before the shooting was no more than 75 seconds, and it was only a matter of "split seconds" between the time he heard Loughnan yelling "drop the knife" and his own firing on Plaintiff.

DISCUSSION

Issue Preclusion and *Heck v. Humphrey*

As a preliminary matter, we dispose of the Officer Defendants' arguments that Plaintiff has no cognizable section 1983 claim because of *Heck v. Humphrey*, 114 U.S. 2364 (1994), and that her section 1983 claim is precluded by collateral estoppel. Because the verdicts in both the criminal-trial and in this case

are general verdicts, the specific facts found by the juries are not available to us. But, after thorough review of the criminal-trial transcript provided to us, we conclude that whether the Officer Defendants' acts were reasonable under the circumstances was not necessarily determined by the criminal trial jury. Also, a finding of excessive force by the jury in this civil case does not necessarily call into question the validity of section 1983 Plaintiff's criminal conviction.

Although we conclude that neither *Heck* nor issue preclusion prevents Plaintiff's claims in this case, the doctrine of issue preclusion does operate to limit what facts we can accept were found by the jury in this civil case for the qualified-immunity decision. *See Allen v. McCurry*, 101 S.Ct. 411, 420 (1980) (rules of collateral estoppel apply to Section 1983 suits). With this idea in mind, we now turn to the decisive question: whether the district court erred in denying the Officer Defendants judgment as a matter of law on the basis of qualified immunity.

Qualified Immunity

In 1995, Defendant Officers moved for summary judgment on the grounds of qualified immunity. The district court determined that material issues of fact in dispute prevented a grant of summary judgment.[7] We affirmed the

7. Although this conclusion is what the court announced, this view of how qualified immunity works at the summary judgment stage is not exactly correct. What should have been said is, when plaintiff's view of the disputed facts was credited, defendants were simply not due qualified immunity under the specific facts of the

(Cont'd)

district court's denial of summary judgment in a brief opinion specifically noting that we were not considering arguments based on issue preclusion or *Heck v. Humphrey.*[8] The case then proceeded to trial to resolve the material issues in dispute. After the jury's verdict for Plaintiff, Defendants filed their post-trial motions.

In denying the Officer Defendants judgment as a matter of law, the district court again said that whether the officers were reasonable in the use of force or entitled to qualified immunity turned "on issues of fact that were properly resolved by the jury." This decision was error. When the rules of law are enforced, Plaintiff cannot prevail in this case. The Officer Defendants were entitled to qualified immunity under the facts supported by the evidence at the civil trial (taken most favorably to Plaintiff) but limited by the facts earlier determined conclusively by the criminal-trial court.

The applicability of qualified immunity is a question of law to be decided by the court. *See Harrell v. Decatur County*, 22 F.3d 1570, 1578 (11th Cir. 1994) (Dubina, J., dissenting) *approved on rehearing* 41 F.3d 1494 (11th Cir. 1995). When a court considers whether or not a government official is entitled to qualified immunity, the specific facts of the case before the court are of critical importance; and the specific facts of the precedents are almost always very important as

(Cont'd)
case in the light of the clearly established law at the time. But we understood the district court's decision and affirmed it.

8. At the time a transcript of the criminal trial had not been provided to the district court, and the Officer Defendants had not yet presented some of these arguments to the district court.

well.[9] *See Saucier v. Katz*, 121 S.Ct. 2151, 2156 (2001) (determining whether right clearly established "must be undertaken in light of the specific context of the case, not as a broad general proposition"); *Anderson v. Creighton*, 107 S.Ct. 3034, 3040 (1987) (noting that pertinent qualified immunity question in probable-cause case is "fact-specific" question of whether reasonable official could have believed, in light of clearly established law, that official's behavior was lawful under circumstances); *Lassiter v. Alabama A&M University Bd. of Regents*, 28 F.3d 1146, 1150 (11th Cir. 1994) (*en banc*) (stating that "general propositions" have little to do with qualified immunity, and bright line that must be crossed to surrender qualified immunity "is not found in abstractions — to act reasonably, to act with probable cause, and so forth — but in studying how these abstractions have been applied in concrete circumstances") (quoting *Barts v. Joyner*, 865 F.2d 1187, 1194 (11th Cir. 1989)); *see also Wilson v. Layne*, 119 S.Ct. 1692, 1700 (1999) (saying "the right allegedly violated must be defined at the appropriate level

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9. We note at this point that we have said that when the question of qualified immunity turns on specific questions of fact, the use of special verdicts or written interrogatories can be very helpful to a judge in determining the legal question of whether qualified immunity applies. *See Priester v. City of Riviera Beach*, 208 F.3d 919, 926 n.6 (11th Cir. 1999); *Cottrell v. Cadldwell*, 85 F.3d 1480, 1487 (11th Cir. 1996) (when Defendant requests written interrogatories or special verdicts, it is error for the district court to refuse to issue them to the jury). But Defendant Officers did not request, nor did the court use special verdicts or written interrogatories to determine, disputed issues of fact in this case. Therefore, all lawfully disputed factual issues and all reasonable inferences therefrom must be taken in the light most favorable to Plaintiff. *See Priester*, 208 F.3d at 925-26 n.3 (citing *Iacobucci v. Boulter*, 193 F.3d 14, 23 (1st 1999)).

of specificity . . ."). Therefore, when reviewing a district court's denial of a motion for judgment as a matter of law in a qualified immunity case, we must make certain assumptions about what facts the jury found in reaching its general verdict for Plaintiff. *See Priester*, 208 F.3d at 923 n.2.

Briefly stated, in the typical case where the jury reaches a verdict in the face of disputed issues of fact, we simply accept as true the version of facts for which evidence (if it was more than a scintilla) was presented by the party who won the jury verdict. But, under the law applicable in this case, the civil jury was not legally entitled to second-guess Plaintiff's conviction for attempted murder of officer Panucci and for battery of officer Loughnan.[10] Based on our review of the record from the criminal trial, we conclude that the jury in the earlier criminal case must have concluded, at the very least, (1) that Plaintiff threw a knife at Panucci, (2) that Plaintiff

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10. The district court instructed the jury with these words: "[t]he Court has taken judicial notice of, and, therefore, you are instructed as a matter of law, that plaintiff, Betty Willingham, was convicted of committing the felony of attempted second-degree murder of Officer Ron Panucci on October 7th, 1987. Under Florida law, this means that the jury in the criminal prosecution of Betty Willingham decided that the State of Florida had proven beyond a reasonable doubt that the plaintiff intended to cause the death of Ronald Panucci and the perpetration of an act imminently dangerous to another and evinced a depraved mind, regardless of human life, although without premeditation, and committed on overt act in furtherance of that attempt."

The court gave a similar instruction regarding the conviction for battery of Loughnan concluding "[y]ou must accept these convictions as established facts in your deliberations and may not reject them or otherwise question their validity."

did attempt to kill Panucci when she threw the knife at him, and (3) that she did strike Officer Loughnan by throwing a glass at him. And these facts must be taken as true and final when we decide what other facts are supported by the civil-trial evidence, taken in the light most favorable to Plaintiff.[11]

So, in the light of the facts necessarily and finally determined by the criminal-trial jury, the facts that might be properly found by the civil jury taking the evidence presented in the

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11. Actions arising under Section 1983 are subject to the rules of collateral estoppel. *See Allen v. McCurry*, 101 S.Ct. 411, 420 (1980). And the courts have applied issue preclusion either to dismiss entire section 1983 claims or to prevent introduction of evidence on a previously decided fact. *See Brown v. Hialeah*, 30 F.3d 1433, 1437 (11th Cir. 1994) (affirming district court's decision to preclude introduction of evidence that Plaintiff did not attempt to shoot Defendant after Plaintiff had already pleaded guilty to attempted murder of Defendant); *Simmons v. O'Brien*, 77 F.3d 1093, 1097 (8th Cir. 1996) (section 1983 claim alleging excessive force leading to coerced confession was precluded by state court decision that confession was voluntary).

When considering whether to give preclusive effect to a state court judgment, we apply the estoppel rules of the state that rendered the judgment. *See Marrese v. American Acad. of Orthopaedic Surgeons*, 105 S.Ct. 1327, 1332 (1985); *Vazquez v. Metropolitan Dade County*, 968 F.2d 1101, 1106 (11th Cir. 1992).

In Florida, collateral estoppel may be employed to bar prosecution or argumentation of an ultimate fact or facts necessarily decided in the prior proceeding. *See State v. Strong*, 593 So.2d 1065, 1067 (Fla. DCA 4th 1992); *United States v. DeMarco*, 791 F.2d 833, 836 (1986). Florida also allows Defendants in a later civil suit to make use of defensive collateral estoppel even though they were not a party to the earlier criminal proceeding. *Zeidwig v. Ward*, 548 So.2d 209 (Fla.1989).

light most favorable to the Plaintiff, are that Plaintiff obtained a number of objects from the kitchen and threw them at Panucci and Loughnan.[12] She threw a glass at Loughnan, striking him in the shoulder; and then she picked up a knife in the kitchen and threw it at Panucci's back in an attempt to kill him. She immediately thereafter raised her hands to her head and, at that time, was shot four times by each of the Officer Defendants. The shots were fired within a split-second of her assault on Loughnan and of her attempt to kill Panucci, but while she was unarmed. She was also standing in the doorway to the kitchen where she had obtained the bottles and knife she had already thrown at the officers.

The question for the purposes of qualified immunity is this one: whether Defendant Officers violated clearly established federal law in 1987, by shooting Plaintiff within a "split second" after she attacked two officers — having just tried to kill one of them — while she, at the moment, was not in the physical control of the police and was standing unarmed but near the area from which she had already obtained four objects she had used as weapons, at least one of which was a potentially lethal weapon.

The Supreme Court has recently offered guidance on how to address properly the question of qualified immunity in

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12. We recognize and have considered Plaintiff's highly successful impeachment of the officers' testimony in this case. Because of these efforts, we understand that the civil jury was at liberty to believe very little of the Officer Defendants' side of the story. The facts recited here, therefore, are taken from those facts we conclude were finally determined by the criminal-trial jury, plus Plaintiff's own civil-trial testimony, and other undisputed evidence in the civil trial.

the context of excessive force cases. In *Saucier*, the Court decided that whether an officer behaved in an objectively reasonable manner in the context of the merits of the excessive force claim is a completely separate and distinct question from whether the officer behaved objectively reasonably under the clearly established preexisting law for qualified immunity purposes. *See* 121 S.Ct. at 2158-59.[13]

Deadly force is permitted under the Fourth Amendment when an officer "has probable cause to believe the suspect poses a threat of serious physical harm, either to the officer or others." *Tennessee v. Garner*, 105 S.Ct. 1694, 1701 (1985). The test for whether excessive force is used is an objective test asking whether a reasonable officer would believe that this level of force is necessary in the situation at hand. *See Graham v. Connor*, 109 S.Ct. 1865, 1872 (1989). Most important, "[t]he calculus of reasonableness must embody allowance for the fact that police officers are often forced to make split-second judgments — in circumstances that are tense, uncertain, and rapidly evolving — about the amount of force that is necessary in a particular situation." *Id.* We have also said that "[f]rom the vantage point of an officer whose life is jeopardized, a potential arrestee who is neither physically subdued nor compliantly yielding remains capable of generating surprise, aggression, and death." *Menuel v. City of Atlanta*, 25 F.3d 990, 995 (11th Cir. 1994).

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13. *Saucier* directly rejects Plaintiff's main argument that a finding of excessive force precludes the qualified immunity defense. That Defendants' conduct has been ultimately determined to be unreasonable under the excessive force analysis does not decide whether the law was already clearly established at the time Defendants acted that what they were doing, given the circumstances, necessarily violated federal law.

Appendix A

We (with reluctance and doubt) accept that the law would allow a reasonable jury to find — given the Plaintiff's evidence, including evidence of Plaintiff being unarmed when shot, of the nature of the weapons she had used and the manner of their use, of the number of police officers present and their location and so on — that the amount of force applied by the Defendant Officers was not reasonable in this case, notwithstanding that Plaintiff had just finished battering and attempting to kill police officers. *See Fitzgerald v. McDaniel*, 833 F.2d 1516, 1519 (11th Cir. 1987) (a jury's assessment of the reasonableness of a police officer's conduct is a factual finding by which the court is bound unless appellant can show an absence of probative facts to support the finding).

The crucial inquiry, however, is whether the law was already clearly established at the time of the incident that the use of deadly force was unlawful under the particular circumstances faced by the officers in this situation. An officer is entitled to qualified immunity if a reasonable officer, under the circumstances, might have thought that the use of force did not violate the federal law at the time of the incident. *See Saucier*, 121 S.Ct. at 2158-59. The principles and goals of the doctrine of qualified immunity are particularly important in cases like this one: where police officers are confronting an unpredictable and dangerous situation in which split-second decisions can make the difference between life and death.

Qualified immunity protects from suit all but the plainly incompetent or one who is knowingly violating the federal law. *Lassiter*, 28 F.3d at 1149. Government officials are not

required to err on the side of caution. *See Davis v. Scherer*, 104 S.Ct. 3012, 3020 (1984). And qualified immunity recognizes "the need to protect officials who are required to exercise their discretion and the related public interest in encouraging the vigorous exercise of official authority." *Butz v. Economou*, 98 S.Ct. 2894, 2911 (1978).

Police officers cannot be expected to delay or to second-guess decisions that must be made in the heat of a dangerous confrontation with a person engaged in violent criminal conduct. Whatever the evidence at the civil trial also shows — given the fact of Plaintiff's 1992 criminal convictions — the factual situation confronted by the Officer Defendants in this case must be basically this one: 1) Plaintiff had just assaulted one officer, attempted to kill another officer; 2) she was not subdued; and 3) she was standing in the door to the kitchen where she had, just moments before, obtained weapons with which she had tried to kill one police officer and assaulted another. Unless the federal law in October 1987 was already clearly established that — under these circumstances — shooting Plaintiff, even if she was unarmed at the moment, did constitute excessive force in violation of the Fourth Amendment, the Defendant Officers are entitled to qualified immunity.

Almost always, to establish the law clearly in the context of the Fourth Amendment, a materially similar case must have already decided that what the police officer was doing was unlawful. *See Priester v. City of Riviera Beach*, 208 F.3d 919, 926 (11th Cir. 2000) ("[N]o bright line exists for identifying when force is excessive; we have therefore concluded that unless a controlling and materially similar

case declares the official's conduct unconstitutional, a defendant is usually entitled to qualified immunity.")[14] Plaintiff presents no earlier cases that would establish that the Officer Defendants' acts, under the circumstances, were clearly illegal at the time of this incident. Our own survey of the case law indicates that in 1987 it was not clearly established that it constituted excessive force to shoot a person under the circumstances presented in this case. Moreover, as recently as 1995, we concluded an officer was entitled to qualified immunity for shooting in 1990 an unarmed man who had just attacked the police officer with a flashlight and had then returned to the man's car. *See Harrell*, 22 F.3d at 1581 (Dubina, J., dissenting) *approved on rehearing* 22 F.3d 1494.

Because the federal law was not already clearly established law in 1987 that it constituted excessive force in violation of the Fourth Amendment to shoot a person under the circumstances presented in this case, we conclude that the Defendant Officers are entitled to qualified immunity.

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14. We also noted in *Priester* that there is a narrow exception to the requirement for materially similar cases when the officer's conduct falls "so far beyond the hazy border between excessive and acceptable force." But, this case, where the police fired within a split second of an attempted murder on one of them, is no such case.

Appendix A

CONCLUSION

Because we have concluded that the Officer Defendants are entitled to the defense of qualified immunity, it is unnecessary for us to reach the question of remittitur. For the Officer Defendants, the district court's judgment is REVERSED. For the City, the district court's judgment is AFFIRMED.

REVERSED IN PART and AFFIRMED IN PART.

APPENDIX B — CORRECTED OMNIBUS ORDER ON POST-TRIAL MOTIONS OF THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA DATED AND FILED NOVEMBER 30, 1998

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

Case No. 90-8156-CIV-UNGARO-BENAGES

BETTY WILLINGHAM,

Plaintiff,

vs.

CITY OF BOYNTON BEACH, et al.,

Defendants.

CORRECTED OMNIBUS ORDER ON POST-TRIAL MOTIONS

THIS CAUSE is before the Court upon the post-trial Motions filed by Defendants in this matter on April 28, 1998, which are as follows: the City of Boynton Beach's ("the City") Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law (DE - 283), James Loughnan's ("Loughnan") and Brian Beucler's ("Beucler") Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law (DE - 285), Defendants' Motion for New Trial (DE - 293), and Defendants' Motion for Remittitur (DE - 289).

THE COURT has considered the Motions, responses and replies, has conducted a thorough review of the record, and

is otherwise fully advised in the premises. Except for the issues discussed below, the Court disposes of the Motions by adopting the rulings made before or during the trial.[1]

I. *BACKGROUND*

In this case, the jury considered Plaintiff Betty Willingham's ("Plaintiff" or "Willingham") claim under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 that Defendants violated her Fourth Amendment right to be free from the use of excessive force when, on October 7, 1987, she was shot eight times by Defendants Loughnan and Beucler, sworn officers of the City of Boynton Beach Police Department ("BBPD"). As to the City, the jury considered Plaintiff's claim that the City was deliberately indifferent to her safety by failing to properly train and supervise Defendants Loughnan and Beucler in the use of deadly force. The jury also considered Defendants Loughnan's and Beucler's defense that they were constitutionally justified in the use of deadly force against Plaintiff because at the time Plaintiff was shot,

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1. Specifically, each of the issues raised in Defendants' Motion for New Trial, with the exception of their argument that the verdict returned by the jury is excessive, were fully considered and disposed of either before or during the trial. Therefore, the undersigned adopts her respective rulings made during trial. Because the Court is setting aside the verdict against the City, the argument that the verdict is excessive, raised both in the Motion for New Trial and the Motion for Remittitur, is only relevant with respect to the compensatory and punitive damages awarded against Officers Loughnan and Beucler. Having considered the arguments of counsel, the undersigned finds that the damage awards are not excessive and that the awards do not shock the conscience of the Court. *See Smith v. Wade*, 461 U.S. 30 (1983); *Goldstein v. Manhattan Indus., Inc.*, 758 F.2d 1435 (11th Cir. 1985). Thus, Defendants' Motions for New Trial and for Remittitur are denied.

she was attempting to kill their fellow officer, Ronald Panucci, as evidenced by the fact that Plaintiff was subsequently charged and convicted of attempted second degree murder of Panucci. After eleven days of trial, the jury returned a verdict of $5,000,000 against Defendants and punitive damage verdicts of $500,000 each against Loughnan and Beucler.

The Incident

The underlying incident began with a violent confrontation between Arnold Sims, who is Willingham's brother, and Panucci arising out of Panucci's intention to complete a traffic stop of Sims in the front yard of Willingham's house. Numerous other officers, including officers Loughnan, Beucler, Blum and Yanuzzi, arrived on the scene to assist Panucci. The testimony concerning what otherwise happened, which is summarized below, was disputed in nearly every respect as follows:

Officer Loughnan: Officer Loughnan testified that upon arriving at the Willingham residence he saw Willingham standing on the stoop of her house yelling and screaming. He then observed Willingham throw one bottle, which struck him on his shoulder, and then another bottle, which bounced off Panucci's back or leg. At that point, Loughnan informed Willingham that she was under arrest and he attempted to apprehend her in the doorway by grabbing her nightgown, but the garment came off in his hands along with a necklace that Willingham was wearing. Willingham then retreated into her home, slamming the door behind her. Loughnan, who could hear Willingham rummaging through the drawers in her kitchen, then took his gun out and held it down by his leg.

Appendix B

Willingham reemerged on the stoop now holding two knives in her hand. She threw the first knife and it hit Panucci's back or the back of his leg. Then she lifted the second knife over her head as though she were about to throw it. Although Loughnan repeatedly yelled at her to drop the knife, she lunged at Panucci's back. At that time, to prevent her from stabbing Panucci, Loughnan shot her four times.

Officer Beucler: Officer Beucler testified that he arrived at the scene with his partner, Officer Blum. Initially Beucler observed Sims and Panucci exchanging heated words and also observed the police dog at Panucci's side, but soon thereafter Panucci and Sims got into a shoving match in which the police dog became "involved." As the scuffle ensued, Beucler suddenly heard Loughnan yell "drop the knife," which he repeated several times. At that point, Beucler saw Willingham on the stoop, saw her throw a knife with her right hand, and saw the knife "kick up off the ground."[2] He then moved within three to four feet of Willingham to position himself between her, Panucci, Sims and the dog. As he was taking up that position, he saw that Willingham had another knife in her hand and that she was moving off the stoop in his and Panucci's direction. Fearing for his and Panucci's life, he fired four rounds into Willingham. As a result of the shots, Willingham fell half in the doorway and half on the stoop.

Beucler was the first person to reach Willingham after she was shot and lying wounded half in the doorway and

2. Beucler testified that he could not tell if Willingham was throwing the knife at the dog, Panucci or Sims, that he did not see the first knife strike Panucci, and that he saw no bottles thrown.

half on the stoop. As Willingham was struggling to get up and Beucler could not see the second knife, he was concerned that she might try to stab someone. He then saw the knife under her body and decided to leave it there.

Other Officers

Sergeant Yanuzzi testified that on the night of the incident, he was the afternoon shift supervisor. At about 11:30 p.m., he was in the police station when he heard Panucci call for assistance and other officers respond to Panucci's call. At that point, Yanuzzi also responded to the Willingham residence. As he exited his vehicle, he saw Panucci engaged in a struggle with Sims and saw that Loughnan was also on the scene. In addition, Yanuzzi was aware of Willingham's presence because he could hear her yelling. As he attempted to pull Sims off of Panucci, he more or less simultaneously saw Willingham come onto the stoop and take a step down with a knife in her hand, and then heard shots fired.

Officer Panucci testified that he was a canine officer on the night of the incident, that he attempted to arrest Sims, that he and Sims became involved in a violent struggle, and that his dog attacked Sims. According to his testimony, he heard gunfire just as Sims and Yanuzzi fell to the ground. He further stated that when the shots were fired he sensed that Willingham was "off to his left" and somewhat behind him, that Willingham was moving toward him when she was shot, and that the shots must have been fired near him because some of the hot casings hit him. He never saw a weapon in Willingham's possession, nor did he see her take any threatening action.

Appendix B

Officer Blum testified that on October 7, 1987, he was traveling with Beucler when they heard Panucci announce over the radio that he was attempting to make a traffic stop. As a result of hearing this, Blum and Beucler responded to the Willingham residence. They arrived simultaneously with Loughnan.

Officer Blum further testified that he initially saw Panucci and Sims in a struggle and Willingham yelling and screaming from the door to her kitchen, that he saw the dog bite Sims, and that he saw Plaintiff throwing bottles. He also stated that, although he heard Beucler or Loughnan yelling for Plaintiff to put down the bottles, at that point he could not see them. Immediately prior to the shooting he saw Plaintiff with a knife raised above her head pointing in a downward position and heard her say, "I am going to *** kill you." (expletive omitted).[3]

Betty Willingham: Betty Willingham testified that she went to bed around 9:00 p.m. on the night of October 7, 1987 because she planned to leave early for Atlanta the following morning, but was awakened when she heard her brother knock on her door and call her name. She grabbed her bathrobe and went to the door to see why he was knocking. As she opened the door she saw Sims, Panucci, and the dog, and she heard Sims and Panucci arguing. She asked Panucci what was the matter, to which he responded that it was none of her "mother *** business." (expletive omitted).

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3. Initially, Blum testified that he only saw the Plaintiff with a bottle in her hand.

Appendix B

As Willingham stood in the doorway and reached for a nearby phone to call her mother, she saw Panucci and the dog approach Sims and back him against the wall of her house. At that point, Sims and Panucci began shoving each other, Panucci gave a command to the dog, and the dog began biting Sims. Fearing that the dog might kill her brother, she yelled at Panucci to "stop the dog" and began looking for something to throw at it. She threw two bottles "down at the dog" to try to make him stop biting her brother's leg. When the dog persisted, she reached inside her house for another bottle, and, finding one, she threw it. When she looked for something else to throw, she saw a knife in the sink, picked it up, and threw it down toward the dog. Through all of this, she remained in her doorway. When she threw the knife, Sims and the dog were between her and Panucci.

When Willingham could not find anything else to throw at the dog, she started pulling her hair with both hands and screaming for Panucci to "stop the dog." It was at that time that she was shot and fell backwards onto the kitchen floor. She testified that she never threw a glass and did not know how the knife came to be on the kitchen floor after she was shot. She denied that Loughnan had attempted to restrain her at any time, that he had pulled her nightgown off, that she was wearing a necklace, that she ever closed the door to her house, or that she ever heard anyone tell her to drop the knife. She did remember that one of the officers who approached her after she was shot told her, in response to her asking why she had been shot, that if he had the opportunity, he would shoot her again. Willingham was shot eight times and, as a result, sustained serious and permanent injuries.

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Stanley Williams: Stanley Williams testified that he is one of Willingham's neighbors. On the night of October 7, 1987, after seeing flashing lights from his bedroom window, Williams walked toward Willingham's residence. Initially, as he was walking toward her house, he saw a dog and an officer and Sims having words. As he crossed the street he saw another police car pull up and two officers get out. At that point, all of the officers and the dog attacked Sims. During the attack, Willingham yelled "leave my brother alone," threw two objects that Williams believed were bottles at the police officers from her stoop, and then retreated into her house. Willingham then reemerged onto the stoop and threw something else in the direction of the officers. Either at this point or upon her retreating and reappearing on the stoop for a third time, the officers shot her in her kitchen doorway. After Willingham was shot, one of the officers on the scene ran over to him, pointed a gun at him and told him to get on the ground or he would "blow [his] *** brains out." (expletive omitted). After the police held Williams on the scene for fifteen minutes, he was told to "get." None of the investigating officers who came to the scene asked Williams for a statement, but that night Williams, on his own initiative, went to the police station and insisted upon making a statement because he believed that Willingham had been shot for no reason.

Investigation and Prosecution

Immediately after the shooting, Loughnan and Beucler were relieved of duty pending an investigation into the incident. In addition, representatives of the BBPD went to the scene to collect the physical evidence. Detective Ostazewski,

one of the crime scenes technicians, found the nightgown and necklace, but they were several feet away from the doorway where Loughnan claimed to have attempted to apprehend Willingham. The crime scene unit took measurements, photographs of the scene, and fingerprints of the various objects on the ground. Each of the objects tested negative for Willingham's fingerprints. The unit also collected blood evidence, casings and bullets, including the bullets extracted from Willingham's body at the hospital.

Other officers were assigned the task of interviewing the witnesses and the officers involved in the incident. Despite the fact that about thirty people had gathered on the street in response to the commotion, on the night of the incident Officer Connolly located only one civilian who was initially willing to give a statement at the police station, but who later refused when he found out his statement would be taped. While on the scene, Detective Baryl interviewed Loughnan and Beucler and took witnesses' statements from three persons from the neighborhood. Loughnan and Beucler also gave taped statements to Deputy Chief DeLoach two days after the incident. In the days following the incident, Lt. Galbraith of Internal Affairs, who had been assigned to present the incident to the Shooting Review Board, conducted additional interviews including interviews of Loughnan and Beucler.

On October 15, 1987, the Shooting Review Board (the "Board") convened to review the circumstances surrounding the shooting of Willingham. According to the memorandum of the proceedings, the Board reviewed all written material made available by Lt. Galbraith. The Board also interviewed Lt. Galbraith, Deputy Chief DeLoach, Sgt. Yanuzzi, Officer

Blum and Sgt. Ostazewski. The Board concluded that Loughnan and Beucler had acted in conformity with Florida Statute § 776.05 which authorizes the use of deadly force in defense of the life of a police officer, and that their use of deadly force did not violate any department policy relating to the use of deadly force. Subsequently, the local State Attorney convened a Grand Jury to consider whether Loughnan and Beucler had acted illegally when they shot Willingham. The Grand Jury also exonerated them.

As noted above, the Palm Beach County State Attorney later charged Willingham and tried her for attempted first degree murder of Panucci and battery on a law enforcement officer (Loughnan). At trial, Willingham asserted that she threw one knife and that she threw it in defense of her brother. Consequently, the jury was instructed on both Willingham's claim that she was legally entitled to defend her brother and on the circumstances under which law enforcement officers are legally entitled to use deadly force. The jury found her guilty of battery on Loughnan and guilty of attempted second degree murder of Panucci, a lesser included offense of attempted first degree murder.

II. *LOUGHNAN'S AND BEUCLER'S MOTION FOR JUDGMENT AS A MATTER OF LAW*

Loughnan and Beucler ("the Officers" or "Defendants") raise four grounds in support of their Motion: (1) the doctrines of collateral estoppel, judicial estoppel or issue preclusion; (2) *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477 (1994); (3) insufficiency of the evidence; and (4) qualified immunity. The third and

fourth arguments have already been resolved by this Court, which rulings the Court adopts herein.[4]

In considering the remaining grounds for Defendants' Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law, the Court is mindful that it must view all evidence in the light most favorable to Plaintiff as the non-moving party and draw all reasonable inferences in her favor. Moreover, the Motion should be denied if "there is substantial evidence opposed to the motions, that is, evidence of such quality and weight that reasonable and fair-minded men in the exercise of impartial judgment might reach different conclusions[.]" *Verbraeken v. Westinghouse Elec. Corp.*, 881 F.2d 1041 (11th Cir. 1989).

A. Collateral Estoppel or Issue Preclusion

The Court also has previously considered the Defendants' contention that Plaintiff was barred from relitigating whether the officers were justified in using deadly force because

4. Specifically, with respect to the Officers' contention that they were justified in using deadly force and that such force was "objectively reasonable" under the circumstances, the Court maintains that this is an issue of fact that was properly resolved by the jury. The qualified immunity issue was raised prior to trial in the Officers' Motion for Summary Judgment. The Court denied that Motion on May 3, 1996 because genuine issues of material fact existed upon which the qualified immunity defense turned. The Officers took an immediate interlocutory appeal from the Court's Order which was affirmed by the Eleventh Circuit. Although the Officers properly and timely request that the Court revisit this factual issue, the Court still finds that the qualified immunity defense turns on issues of fact that were properly resolved by the jury. *See Cottrell v. Caldwell*, 85 F.3d 1480,1488 (11th Cir. 1996) The Court, however, addresses the collateral estoppel and *Heck v. Humphrey* issues herein.

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Plaintiff was convicted of attempted second degree murder of Officer Panucci (D.E. 94). However, at that time, Defendants either failed to supply or were unable to supply pertinent portions of the record of the criminal trial to the Court, and therefore, the undersigned held that Defendants had failed to establish that the issues of justifiable use of deadly force had been actually litigated and necessarily decided by the jury in the criminal case in reaching its verdict. As the parties have now been able to supply most of the transcripts from the criminal trial, the Court revisits the issue.

As this Court noted in its previous Order, when considering whether to give preclusive effect to a state court judgment, a federal court must apply the collateral estoppel rules of the state which rendered the judgment. *See Marrese v. American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons*, 470 U.S. 373, 379-81 (1985); *Vazquez v. Metropolitan Dade County*, 968 F.2d 1101, 1106 (11th Cir. 1992). *See also* U.S. Const., art. IV § 1 (full faith and credit). Actions arising under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 are subject to the rules of collateral estoppel. *See Allen v. McCurry*, 449 U.S. 90,103-05 (1980). Thus, this Court must apply the collateral estoppel rules of the state of Florida to determine whether Willingham's conviction for attempted second degree murder estopped her § 1983 action.

In *Vazquez*, the Eleventh Circuit analyzed Florida's collateral estoppel law in light of the Florida Supreme Court's decision in *Zeidwig v. Ward*, 548 So. 2d 209 (Fla. 1989). *See Vazquez*, 968 F.2d at 1106-08. In *Zeidwig*, the Florida Supreme Court "approve[d] the use of defensive collateral estoppel to prevent a criminal defendant, as a plaintiff, from relitigating the same issue which has been litigated in prior

criminal proceedings." *Zeidwig*, 548 So. 2d at 209. Based on this holding, the Eleventh Circuit recognized the use of defensive collateral estoppel in a civil suit regarding a criminal verdict under Florida law. *See Vazquez*, 968 F.2d at 1106-07. Pursuant to *Zeidwig*, the Eleventh Circuit held that the federal standard for applying collateral estoppel announced in *Precision AirParts, Inc. v. Avco Corp.*, 736 F.2d 1499 (11th Cir. 1984), *cert. denied*, 469 U.S. 1191 (1985), is also applicable as a matter of Florida law. *See Vazquez*, 968 F.2d at 1107. Under this standard, there are three prerequisites to the application of collateral estoppel: "(1) . . . the issue at stake [must] be identical to the one involved in the prior litigation; (2) . . . the issue [must] have been actually litigated; and (3) . . . the determination of the issue in the prior litigation [must] have been a critical and necessary part of the judgment in that earlier decision." *Id.* (citations and internal quotations omitted).[5]

Moreover, in *Vazquez*, the Eleventh Circuit applied this standard to facts which are analogous to the circumstances in this case. In *Vazquez*, the jury convicted the defendant of culpable negligence based on his shooting six bullets through

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5. *Zeidwig* represented a departure from Florida's traditionally strict adherence to the requirement of mutuality of parties for the application of collateral estoppel. *See Stogniew v. McQueen*, 656 So. 2d 917, 919 (Fla. 1995). *Zeidwig* involved a criminal defendant who had brought an ineffective assistance of counsel claim in an unsuccessful post-conviction proceeding. The court estopped Zeidwig from raising the same claim in a legal malpractice action against his former lawyer. In *Stogniew*, the Florida Supreme Court made clear that the mutuality requirement still exists, distinguishing *Zeidwig* as a "narrow exception in which collateral estoppel was permitted in a defensive context and then only under the compelling facts of that case." *Id.*

his front door while his home was surrounded by police officers. In response to Vazquez's shooting, the offcers returned fire wounding Vazquez and killing his brother. According to the Court of Appeals, the only necessary conclusion from the jury's verdict was the jury's belief that Vazquez's actions were not reasonable in response to his situation. The verdict did not address or rule on the propriety of the police officers' actions after Vazquez's act of culpable negligence and from which Vazquez's excessive force claim arose. *Id.* The Eleventh Circuit went on to recognize that the "objectively reasonable" standard established in *Graham v. Connor*, 490 U.S. 386 (1989) for assessing an officer's actions in an excessive force case, does not foreclose the possibility that officers may respond in an illegal manner when responding to a criminal act. *See Vazquez*, 968 F.2d at 1107. *See also Nelson v. Jashurek*, 109 F.3d 142 (3d Cir. 1997) (plaintiff s conviction for resisting arrest did not preclude claim for excessive force under Cir. 1983); *Donovan v. Thames*, 105 F.3d 291 (6th Cir. 1997) (same); *Courtney v. Reeves*, 635 F.2d 326, 329 (5th Cir. 1981); *Hernandez v. City of Los Angeles*, 624 F.2d 935 (9th Cir. 1980) (section 1983 plaintiff s conviction for resisting arrest does not estop him from arguing excessive force in making arrest because the jury could have found that plaintiff and the officers used excessive force); *Williams v. Liberty*, 461 F.2d 325 (7th Cir. 1972) (plaintiff in § 1983 action not estopped from police brutality claim due to conviction for battery on police officer).

Having now had the opportunity to review the transcript of the criminal trial (to the extent available) in light of *Vasquez* and Florida law concerning collateral estoppel generally, the undersigned remains unable to conclude that

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Willingham's conviction necessarily resolved the question of whether the officers used unconstitutionally excessive force. Among other important distinctions, Willingham maintained in the criminal trial, just as she had in her civil trial, that she threw only one knife and was unarmed at the time of the shooting. Thus, although the jury found her guilty of attempted second degree murder of Panucci, the jury may have resolved the conflict in the evidence concerning whether one or two knives were thrown to be consistent with Willingham's version of the offense. If that occurred, the jury would never have reached the issue of whether Willingham was acting in self defense and whether the officers were justified in the use of deadly force after the first knife was thrown.[6] Thus, similar to *Vasquez*, it cannot be ascertained whether Willingham's criminal trial jury ever addressed the propriety of Loughnan and Beucler's actions.

In reaching this conclusion, the undersigned recognizes, as argued by Defendants, that the entire incident may have transpired in less than two minutes and that the events may have required the officers to make instantaneous judgments regarding their use of force. These facts are relevant, however,

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6. Another possible scenario is that the jury concluded that Willingham threw two knives, but *not* in defense of her brother. If so, the jury may not have reached the issue of whether the officers were justified in using deadly force. Also, the undersigned has considered but rejected Defendants' argument that the criminal trial jury necessarily convicted Willingham of second degree murder because she threw the *second* knife. As explained above, there were other possible resolutions of the conflicts in the evidence, particularly since Loughnan testified in the civil trial, presumably consistent with his testimony in the criminal trial, that he saw the first knife bounce off of Panucci's back or leg.

to the issue of whether the officers were entitled to the protections of qualified immunity — not to the technical legal defense of collateral estoppel. Given the conflicts in the evidence concerning the sequence of the pertinent events and the general nature of the verdict, Defendants cannot demonstrate that a determination that the officers were justified in shooting Willingham was a critical and necessary part of the jury's decision that Willingham attempted to kill Panucci.

Therefore, collateral estoppel, and the related doctrines of judicial estoppel and issue preclusion, did not preclude Willingham from proceeding to trial in this case.

B. *Heck v. Humphrey*

In *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477 (1994), the United States Supreme Court held that "when a state prisoner seeks damages in a § 1983 suit, the district court must consider whether a judgment in favor of the plaintiff would necessarily imply the invalidity of his conviction or sentence; if it would, the complaint must be dismissed unless the plaintiff can demonstrate that the conviction or sentence has already been invalidated." *Id.* at 487. Based on this ruling, Defendants contend that Plaintiff, who remains convicted of attempted second degree murder of Panucci, should have been precluded from bringing her § 1983 claim in this case.

However, *Heck* was decided on facts far more straightforward than those in the instant action. Heck was convicted in Indiana state court of voluntary manslaughter for killing his wife. While serving his sentence, Heck filed a § 1983 suit in federal court naming the prosecutors in the criminal

action and one of the investigators as defendants and claiming common law malicious prosecution. However, an essential element of a successful malicious prosecution action is termination of the prior criminal proceeding in favor of the accused. *See id.* at 484-85. Thus, the Supreme Court ruled that Heck's § 1983 action for malicious prosecution was necessarily precluded by his still valid conviction. *See id.* The Supreme Court's holding stemmed, in part, from the principle that a civil suit is not an appropriate vehicle to collaterally attack a conviction. *See id. See also* 8 S. Speiser, C. Krause, & A. Gans, American Law of Torts § 28:5, at 24 (1991).

As an example of a § 1983 action that would necessarily imply the plaintiffs wrongful conviction if successful, the Court considered a convicted state defendant sentenced for resisting arrest, who then brings a § 1983 action against the arresting officers. The Supreme Court explained that in order to prevail in the § 1983 action, the plaintiff "would have to negate an element of the offense of which he has been convicted." *Heck*, 512 U.S. at 487 n.6.

Further, the *Heck* Court noted that "if the district court determines that the plaintiff's action, even if successful, will not demonstrate the invalidity of any outstanding criminal judgment against the plaintiff, the action should be allowed to proceed in the absence of some other bar to the suit." *Id.* at 487. As an example of such a situation, the Court noted that a suit for damages based on an allegedly unreasonable search may lie "even if the challenged search produced evidence that was introduced in a state criminal trial resulting in the § 1983 plaintiff's still-outstanding conviction." *Id.* at 487 n.7. The Court explained that doctrines such as the independent source and

inevitable discovery doctrines,[7] as well as harmless error,[8] allow for the possibility of a successful suit for damages that would not necessarily imply the invalidity of the plaintiff's conviction. *See id. See also Gonzalez v. Entress*, 133 F.3d 551 (7th Cir. 1998) (application of excessive force to obtain confession violates Constitution and is actionable under § 1983 notwithstanding admission of confession at trial at which § 1983 plaintiff is convicted); *Simpson v. Rowan*, 73 F.3d 134 (7th Cir. 1995) (felony murder conviction did not bar § 1983 suit under Fourth Amendment based on illegal search because illegal search or arrest may be followed by valid conviction); *Rowe v. City of Ft. Lauderdale*, 8 F. Supp. 2d 1369, 1373 (S.D. Fla. 1998) (recognizing that suit for improper seizure of property would not imply invalidity of conviction for sexual battery under *Heck).* Thus, whether *Heck* applies to preclude a § 1983 claim is dependent upon the identification of the precise factual and legal issues resolved by the criminal trial jury.

Since *Heck*, several courts have had occasion to consider under what circumstances *Heck* bars a plaintiff convicted of some form of assault on a law enforcement officer from maintaining a § 1983 action based on the alleged use of excessive force during the same incident. These decisions suggest that, consistent with *Heck*, the critical issue is whether the criminal case record conclusively demonstrates that the jury's finding of guilt actually reflected its judgment that the plaintiff's criminal conduct justified the use of force that is the subject of the plaintiff's subsequent § 1983 claim. Thus, for example, in *DuFour Dowell v. Cogger*, 969 F. Supp. 1107 (N.D. Ill.

7. *See Murray v. United States*, 487 U.S. 533, 539 (1988).

8. *See Arizona v. Fulminante*, 499 U.S. 279, 307-08 (1991).

1997), the district court held that the plaintiff's § 1983 action for excessive force was not barred due to her conviction for resisting arrest. Although the plaintiff had been charged with resisting arrest for pushing, kicking, and wrestling with the arresting officer, her conviction was pursuant to a jury instruction stating only that the jury had to find that "the defendant knowingly resisted or obstructed the performance by [the officer] of an authorized act within his official capacity." *Id.* at 1117. The court rejected many of the same arguments made by Defendants in the instant motion and held that, under *Heck*, a finding of excessive force would not necessarily be inconsistent with the validity of the plaintiff's conviction because it could not find with certainty that the criminal trial jury had concluded that the Plaintiff pushed, kicked, or assaulted the arresting officer, as opposed to some other conduct that amounted to resisting arrest.[9] *See id.* at 1118.

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9. The *DuFour-Dowell court* found that "[t]he jury was not required to specify on what basis it found DuFour-Dowell guilty of resisting arrest. The jury did not have to find that DuFour-Dowell physically resisted or retaliated when knocked to the ground. There were other actions on which the jury could have based its verdict." *DuFour Dowell*, 969 F. Supp. at 1117. Similarly, the jury in Willingham's criminal trial was not instructed that it had to find that any particular conduct constituted attempted second degree murder (*i.e.* with which knife they believed she attempted to stab Panucci). Also, the defendants in *DuFour-Dowell* argued that self-defense to excessive force is a defense to resisting arrest thereby making an excessive force finding inconsistent with DuFour-Dowell's conviction. *Id.* at 1118. The court rejected this argument because of the various facts from which the jury could have made a determination of resisting arrest. *Id.* The same is true for Willingham's conviction for attempted second degree murder.

Similarly, in *Smithart v. Towery*, 79 F.3d 951 (9th Cir. 1996) the plaintiff, who had been convicted of assault with a deadly weapon by driving a truck at the defendant police officers, alleged that he was beaten "beyond recognition with unnecessary force" after he exited his vehicle. *Id.* The Ninth Circuit held that, while the plaintiff was barred from challenging the validity of his arrest, his excessive force claim was not barred by *Heck* because it did not necessarily imply the invalidity of his conviction. *Id.* Moreover, the court recognized the possibility that by the time the alleged excessive force was applied, the plaintiff may no longer have posed a threat to the defendants. *Id. See also Wells v. Bonner*, 45 F.3d 90, 95 (5th Cir. 1995) (assuming without deciding that finding of excessive force during plaintiff's arrest would not imply the invalidity of plaintiff's conviction); *Simpson v. City of Pickens, Miss.*, 887 F. Supp. 126 (S.D. Miss. 1995) (plaintiffis valid conviction for resisting arrest under Mississippi law did not necessarily bar § 1983 claim for use of excessive force).[10]

Moreover, the Court has considered *Crooms v. P.O. Mercado*, 955 F. Supp. 985 (N.D. Ill. 1997), upon which Defendants heavily rely. In *Crooms*, the plaintiff, who had been convicted of resisting arrest, sued the arresting officer under § 1983 for having used excessive force in effecting the arrest. However, the sole factual dispute at Crooms' criminal

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10. *But see, e.g., Delaney v. Metelski*, 114 F.3d 1193 (9th Cir. 1997) (conviction of reckless endangerment precluded § 1983 action for use of excessive force by shooting during arrest); *Hudson v. Hughes*, 98 F.3d 868 (5th Cir. 1996) (recognizing *Wells* and *Smithart, supra*, but denying § 1983 excessive force claim under *Heck* on its facts due to conviction of battery on an officer). In *Hudson*, the court found that because the criminal jury rejected the justification defense, a successful § 1983 claim would imply invalidity of the conviction.

trial was whether the plaintiff pushed the defendant police officer prior to his arrest. Thus, the district court found from the criminal trial record that Crooms' conviction for resisting arrest necessarily required the jury to find that he pushed the officer: "The sole factual basis for the conviction was that Crooms resisted Mercado's investigation by pushing Mercado in the chest." *Id.* at 990. These facts, however, are clearly distinguishable from the instant action. Further, the *Crooms* court noted that "it is not always the case that a section 1983 claim for excessive force would necessarily imply the invalidity of a conviction for resisting an officer. . . . However, . . . because of the facts of this case, a successful prosecution of Crooms' section 1983 claim would necessarily imply the invalidity of his conviction for resisting an officer." *Id.* at 991. *See also Booker v. Ward*, 94 F.3d 1052, 1056 (7th Cir. 1996) (explaining that *Heck* does not bar a number of § 1983 Fourth Amendment claims because such claims do not "inevitably undermine the conviction") (citation omitted), *cert. denied*, 117 S. Ct. 952 (1997); *Simpson v. Rowan*, 73 F.3d 134, 136 (7th Cir. 1995) (holding that *Heck* did not bar § 1983 claim for illegal search because the claim would not necessarily undermine the plaintiff's conviction for felony murder), *cert. denied*, 117 S. Ct. 104 (1996).

Pursuant to *Heck* and the other decisions discussed above, the undersigned has attempted to identify the precise issues which were concluded as a result of the criminal jury's finding that Willingham attempted to murder Panucci in the second degree. Having done so, the undersigned remains persuaded that the jury's finding in this case, that Officers Loughnan and Beucler used excessive force when they shot Betty Willingham eight times, does not necessarily imply

the invalidity of her conviction. While it is true that much of the same evidence presented in the criminal trial was presented here, neither the jury's verdict, nor the instructions or charging document in the criminal case required that the jury find that Willingham threw the second knife upon which the Defendants relied in both cases to justify their use of deadly force. As discussed above with respect to the issue of collateral estoppel, the criminal jury may have resolved the evidentiary conflict consistent with Willingham's contention that she threw only one knife. Under that version of the facts, she would have been unarmed when she was shot, and consequently, the use of deadly force may not have been justified. Thus, because it is impossible to ascertain precisely upon what facts the jury convicted Willingham and because either scenario could plausibly support the conviction, a finding that the officers were not authored to use deadly force would not necessarily imply that she was wrongfully convicted. Therefore, her § 1983 claim would not be precluded by *Heck*.

III. *THE CITY'S MOTION FOR JUDGMENT AS A MATTER OF LAW*

The jury found "a pattern or custom within the City of Boynton Beach of failing to train, supervise or discipline the City's police officers that was deliberately indifferent to the risk of, and actually caused the deprivation of, Plaintiff's civil rights by Defendants Loughnan and Beucler." *See* Jury Verdict. In its Motion, the City contends that Plaintiff failed to present sufficient evidence to establish liability pursuant to this theory of municipal liability. Below, the Court summarizes the relevant evidence in the light most favorable to the Plaintiff and then explains the manner in which it was legally insufficient.

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A. Evidence of a Custom or Policy

The evidence relevant to Plaintiff's claim against the City mainly consisted of the testimony of her expert, former City of Miami Chief of Police Kenneth Harms ("Harms"), the officers involved in Willingham's shooting, former BBPD Police Chiefs Hillery and Dettman, former BBPD Deputy Chief DeLoach and documentary evidence including BBPD's written policies concerning use of force, the findings of the Board, and two studies of the City's police force done after Willingham's shooting: the 1987 "Task Force Report" and the 1992 "Assessment of Police Department Status Regarding Race and Sex Discrimination" ("Murphy/Mayo Report"). By way of summary, this evidence, viewed in the light most favorable to Plaintiff, was as follows:

Kenneth Harms: Plaintiff's expert, Kenneth Harms, worked for the City of Miami Police Department from 1959 through 1985, serving as police chief from 1978 through 1984. Harms formulated his opinions by reviewing the depositions in this case, statements taken by the police department and the State Attorney's Office, the investigation and recommendation of the shooting Review Board in the Willingham matter, and the policies and procedures of the BBPD. From the beginning, Harms stressed the importance of training with respect to investigations into incidents involving the use of deadly force and citizens' complaints alleging the use of excessive force.

Harms' first "opinion" was based on his review of the internal affairs investigation done by Lt. Galbraith and Deputy Chief DeLoach. Based on his review of these documents,

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Harms was asked to assume that the officers shot Willingham upon observing her lunge with a knife from five or six feet away at another officer. He testified that if the officers believed that the life of another was in imminent peril as a result of such circumstances, then the use of deadly force would be appropriate. Assuming that the individual did not have anything in her hand but was standing on her stoop reaching for her head, Harms testified that the use of deadly force would not fall within the accepted police standards or prevailing practices within the law enforcement community.[11]

Harms noted that it is important to understand the facts and circumstances associated with a particular investigation by following what occurred from the time the incident started beyond its conclusion, in order to ascertain what the department did to investigate, and whether there were any discipline problems or training needs. He continued that it is important to examine a department's policy of investigating citizen complaints to make sure that there is a policy, and that such policy includes investigating all complaints based on established criteria, logging the complaints in some system to keep track of when they are generated, determining who is involved, documenting how long the investigation takes, and documenting the conclusion and resultant discipline or retraining. Harms testified that it is important to hold officers accountable for their conduct in order to establish zones of tolerance reflecting the boundaries of conduct that management will tolerate. In order to create appropriate zones of tolerance, it is important that there be both the effective

11. It is this inappropriate use of excessive force, according to Harms, that would result from the City's failure to train or supervise the officers with respect to the use of force.

reporting and investigation of citizens' complaints, and the proper supervision, training and discipline of officers.

Harms' second "opinion" was that the citizen complaint reporting system was inadequate based on two studies of the BBPD that were conducted after the Willingham shooting. When asked whether this finding had anything to do with whether excessive force was used on October 7,1987,[12] he opined that it did because if officers are not held accountable for their conduct, the zones of tolerance widen and create an atmosphere where officers may believe they will not be held accountable for their conduct. With respect to the recommendation that an early-warning system be instituted, Harms stated that such a system enables the department to track particular incidents, such as those involving the use of unnecessary force, so that supervisors can identify problem officers and determine what training, discipline, or other remedial action may be required.

Harms next discussed his review of the BBPD's written policies and its investigation of the Willingham incident. Harms found that, with the exception of certain areas, the BBPD's written policies generally comport with standards and prevailing practices in the law enforcement community. With respect to its policy on citizen complaints, Harms opined that the written policy is generally "good" but that the *de facto* application of the policy may not be. Similarly, Harms testified that the written policies of the Board are "good," but the Willingham investigation did not adequately follow the Board's policies. For example, there were no written reports

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12. As the Court explains, *infra*, these studies were done *after* Willingham's shooting. Consequently, the information and recommendations were unavailable to the BBPD until after this incident.

by the two officers involved in the shooting, the investigation failed to identify all of the witnesses, the investigating officers failed to get sworn statements from the eyewitnesses, and the investigating officers failed to properly identify and document all of the physical evidence. Harms was particularly critical of the fact that the statements were not sworn and the transcripts of the statements were not signed. He also found that the investigation was incomplete and failed to address the incident in its entirety. Harms pointed out that Loughnan allowed Willingham to retreat into her house and grab a knife, and that the incomplete investigation resulted in insufficient information to properly evaluate what happened. Harms also expressed concern about a policy where incidents are reported up a chain of command to the chief who ultimately decides whether an investigation should be conducted. Rather, he opined that a department should have a system where certain criteria automatically trigger an investigation.

Next, Harms testified concerning the Board's Memorandum from Captain Clifford Lewis to Chief Hillery. He found the memorandum to be deficient under the BBPD's written policy and the prevailing standards and practices within the law enforcement community. Specifically, he criticized the fact that no record was created of who testified before the Board or what evidence was considered.[13] Harms also reviewed the BBPD's policy pertaining to use of deadly force and use of unreasonable force. He found that the deadly force policy was "good," but the unnecessary force policy was deficient in that

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13. Contrary to this opinion, Captain Lewis's memorandum states that the Board interviewed Deputy Chief John DeLoach, Lt. William Galbraith, Sergeant Christopher Yanuzzi, Officer Warren Blum and Sergeant Henry Ostazewski.

it neither defined what "force" meant or what level of force was acceptable. Further, Harms' opined that a department that does not document, catalogue or log use of force incidents would not have a policy comporting with the standards and prevailing practices within the law enforcement community. He testified that for discipline or training purposes, all uses of force should be documented and logged, and should indicate which officers used force and under what circumstances.

Finally, Harms testified that, based on his review of the documentation of the Willingham investigation, the procedures, depositions and his experience, the City of Boynton Beach fell far short in its supervision, training and discipline of officers, specifically in regard to Officers Loughnan and Beucler.

The Task Force Report: In November 1987, the City of Boynton Beach created a nine member Task Force On Police Abuse and Racial Tension ("Task Force") to review allegations of police brutality against blacks that were prompted, in part, by the Willingham shooting. Comprised of a cross-section of the community, the Task Force generated a report based on the following findings: (1) that there was racial tension between the public and the police department in the Cherry Hills area (the area of the Willingham incident); and (2) that allegations of the use of excessive force[14] were often raised when large crowds gathered when officers attempted to make

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14. The Report stated: "While the Task Force heard individual testimonies from citizens . . . on allegations where police used excessive force in apprehending and making an arrest, based on limited data, the Task Force found no evidence of a systematic effort to abuse Blacks."

arrests in the minority community. The Report recommended, in relevant part, that the BBPD expand its system to allow citizens to file complaints at locations other than the police department, such as schools and churches. The Report also reflected only one instance in which an officer had been found to have used excessive force. As a result of that incident, Officer Blum had been suspended for holding a gun to the head of a Black suspect during questioning.

Murphy/Mayo Report: This Report was generated by an independent firm located in Alexandria, Virginia and was commissioned by the City Manager to assess the BBPD's status regarding race and sex discrimination. In part, the investigation was initiated because black citizens of Boynton Beach had expressed hesitancy in filing complaints that concerned police misconduct because they feared harassment and believed that their complaints would not be properly investigated. The study found that the complaint filing procedures for citizens were inadequate. The Report also indicated the need for an "early warning" file to alert the BBPD to an officer with a high number of complaints before a serious incident occurred. Ultimately, the Report's primary recommendation was the implementation of an improved civilian complaint review process and recording system.

Officer Loughnan: Officer Loughnan testified to some of the training that he received by the BBPD. This included weapons training and training with respect to the use of force in arresting suspects. He was trained to use force pursuant to a scale on which force levels escalate from mere presence through several intermediate levels to the use of deadly force to protect another from serious bodily injury or death. The lowest

levels of force after mere presence are verbal commands and then "soft hands" (*i.e.* simply grabbing an individual by the arm and escorting him out of a crowd for arrest). "Soft hands" was the type of force he attempted to use on Willingham when he tried to arrest her in her doorway. The next level of permissible force is "hard hands," which is the equivalent of fistfighting, followed by use of a police baton or nightstick, followed by deadly force. He also testified that he was a member of the SWAT team, for which he received special training for high-violence, armed conflict and hostage situations, and that, when he shot Willingham, he fired two "double-taps." He further testified that when using deadly force, he had been trained to shoot to kill and to "double-tap" — to pull the trigger twice very quickly, which is considered the equivalent of one shot.

Two days after Willingham's shooting, Loughnan gave his taped statement to Deputy Chief DeLoach. Loughnan never filled out a police report in this case. When he returned to the police station, he had a conversation with Officer Beucler about what had happened and what would happen to them at that point *(e.g.*, suspension, review boards, grand jury). Sometime after the incident, Loughnan testified before a grand jury that had been convened to determine whether his actions had violated any criminal statutes. The Grand Jury found no criminal action on his part.

Officer Beucler: Officer Beucler testified to some of the training that he received by the BBPD. His training included weapons training, and he explained that his shooting certification must be repeated every six months at the shooting range. He also explained that he was trained to "double-tap" when firing his semi-automatic weapon. Beucler spoke to

Appendix B

Officer Bayerl at the police station immediately after the Willingham incident, but he did not fill out a police report or generate any notes with regard to the shooting. Two days later, he gave his statement to Deputy Chief DeLoach and he subsequently testified before the grand jury.

Deputy Chief DeLoach: DeLoach had been the deputy chief of the police department about a year when Willingham was shot. As deputy chief, he was responsible for investigating citizen complaints. DeLoach explained that the department utilized a Supervisor's Incident Report form for incidents involving excessive or deadly force, but that there was no form that an officer was required to complete after using force. He further testified that the department did not have any system for tracking incidents involving the use of force by the officer involved nor did it have any early warning system that would alert the department to a problem officer. He also testified that the witnesses to the Willingham incident were not required to review and sign their statements.

Chief Hillery: Chief Hillery became Chief of Police for the City in 1984 and was the Chief at the time of the Willingham shooting. At that time, the department was seeking accreditation. The Department did not have a separate internal affairs section; rather, Chief Hillery decided whether an internal affairs investigation would be done and by whom. Also, the department did not maintain a log of citizen complaints or an internal affairs log, nor did it have a formal early warning system to alert him to problem officers. However, all citizen complaints were maintained in one location and Deputy Chief DeLoach, who had had some training in internal affairs investigations, trained Lt. Galbraith to also conduct such

investigations. During Chief Hillery's tenure, there were investigations into police misconduct, but he never sought criminal charges against any officer for using excessive force.

He further testified that there was not an internal affairs investigation into the Willingham shooting because the matter was presented to the Shooting Review Board and the Grand Jury. He did not recall reviewing the investigation conducted by DeLoach and Lt. Galbraith for the Shooting Review Board, but was sure that DeLoach would have kept him informed.

He also recalled that he served on the Task Force that was convened after the Willingham shooting and that the Task Force was formed to investigate the relationship between the police force and the minority community. The Task Force concluded that the perception that excessive force was being used routinely in the minority community was not accurate. However, in response to the perception, he decided that citizen complaints would be accepted over the phone and at locations other than the police department. After the Murphy/Mayo Report, he made additional changes to the report filing system.

Former Chief Detman: Detman preceded Hillery as Chief of Police and served in that capacity for three years. He testified that during his tenure, citizen complaints were initially addressed by the watch commander, and then if necessary, they were passed on to the division commander for investigation, and that internal affairs investigations could result from this process. He also testified that no complaint or internal affairs log was maintained by the Department.

Detman further testified that, while he was Chief, he served on the Board that investigated all incidents in which officers

discharged their firearms in the line of duty. Finally, he testified that officers were taught a scale of force that could be utilized in effecting arrests and that officers were allowed to use their firearms to protect themselves or the life of another from death or serious bodily injury.

Written policies: Among the documents submitted into evidence by Plaintiff was General Order #11 — '85, "Use of Deadly Force" (PX 62E) which set forth the guidelines concerning the use of deadly force applicable at the time of the Willingham shooting. Generally, the policy allowed the use of deadly force only when necessary to protect the officer or another from the loss of life or serious bodily injury, but restricted the use of such force when lesser force could be used to restrain or apprehend a perpetrator and when deadly force would create an unreasonable risk to innocent persons. Also pursuant to the policy, every officer using deadly force was to be relieved of duty and placed in a non-disciplinary status with no loss of pay or benefits pending counseling and an investigation into the incident. Moreover, each incident involving the use of deadly force was to be reported up the chain of command and referred to the State Attorney's office for review.

The Plaintiff also submitted into evidence the Board's policy dated January 24, 1977 (PX 62A), providing that the Chief of Police convene a Shooting Review Board comprised of his appointees to investigate each instance in which an officer discharged a firearm that resulted in injury to a person or damage to property. The purpose of the Board was to conduct an in-depth investigation into the incident that addressed whether the use of deadly force comported with Florida law, whether the use of deadly force presented any

danger to civilians or other police personnel in the area, and whether the use of deadly force violated applicable departmental policy.

Lastly, the Plaintiff submitted an excerpt from the Department's policy manual setting forth the Department's policies concerning the use of force (PX 62 D) and the Department's citizen complaint policy, (PX 62B). The use of force policy counseled restraint in the use of force, prohibited the use of unnecessary force in making arrests, and provided for the use of only that degree of force necessary to effect the arrest and bring the prisoner safely to the police building for booking. The manual further required that each officer using physical force report such incidents as soon as possible to his supervisor. The supervisor was then required to write a report to the Chief of Police "through channels." According to the citizen complaint policy, all complaints were to be permanently and chronologically maintained in a central file, the Chief of Police or his designated subordinate was to be made aware of every complaint "without delay," the Department was to retain complete record of complaint reception, investigation and adjudication, and the complainants were to be notified of the final disposition of complaints. As to an investigation, the policy emphasized that complaints be investigated in a manner to insure "swift, fair, and efficient correction of reported complaints." Those procedures included deploying investigators during hours consistent with the incident prompting the complaint, public convenience and departmental needs, obtaining the assistance of prosecuting agencies and completing the investigation within thirty days unless an extension of the deadline was granted by the Chief of Police with notice to the complainant.

Appendix B

B. Legal Analysis

As stated above, the sole theory of municipal liability that Plaintiff requested be submitted to the jury was whether the City, as a matter of custom or policy, was deliberately indifferent to the Plaintiff's Fourth Amendment right to be free from the use of excessive force. Therefore, to the extent that Plaintiff elicited testimony from Harms that was critical of BBPD's policies respecting citizen complaints and the use of unnecessary force at trial, Plaintiff's point was *not* that the policies as written were unconstitutional or otherwise illegal. Rather, Plaintiff's point was that the vagueness or weaknesses in the written policies was one of several factors contributing to the BBPD's failure to train or supervise its officers in the use of deadly force. Moreover, Harms pronounced the deadly force policy to be "good." Thus, the Court analyzes the evidence in accordance with the Supreme Court and Eleventh Circuit precedent which delimits the circumstances under which a municipality can be liable under § 1983 for having adopted a *de facto* policy or custom of inadequately training or supervising its employees.

The Supreme Court has established two fundamental requirements for holding a city liable under § 1983 for inadequate training or supervision policies: culpability and causation. *See Board of County Comm'rs v. Brown*, 520 U.S. 397 (1997); *City of Canton v. Harris*, 489 U.S. 378 (1989). First, the municipal policy must have been adopted with "deliberate indifference" to its known or obvious consequences. Second, the municipality must be the "moving force" behind the violation. *See City of Canton*, 489 U.S. at 388-89.

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In *Monell v. Department of Soc. Svcs. of City* of *New York*, 436 U.S. 658 (1978), the Court held that a local government may not be held liable under respondeat superior for constitutional torts committed by a municipal employee. Instead, it is only ". . . when execution of a government's policy or custom, whether made by its lawmakers or by those whose edicts or acts may fairly be said to represent official policy, inflicts the injury that the government as an entity is responsible under § 1983." *Monell*, 436 U.S. at 694. *Monell* also set a high threshold for causation, requiring that the plaintiff establish that the municipal policy be the "moving force" behind the constitutional violation. *Id.*

The Supreme Court clarified the *Monell* requirements in *City of Canton v. Harris*, 489 U.S. 378 (1989), a case in which the theory of liability was failure to train. The Court held that, in limited circumstances, a municipality can be held liable for a failure to train its police officers. Specifically, plaintiffs seeking to win under this theory must first prove a direct causal link between the municipal policy and the constitutional deprivation; they then must establish that the city consciously adopted a policy reflecting "deliberate indifference" to the relevant constitutional rights of its citizens. *See id.* at 389. The Court deemed these rigorous standards necessary in order to protect municipalities from *respondeat superior* liability under § 1983 and the courts from having to engage "in an endless exercise of second-guessing municipal employee-training programs." *Id.* at 392.

Subsequently, in *Board of County Comm'rs of Bryan County v. Brown*, 520 U.S. 397 (1997), the Supreme Court underscored the need for *Monell* plaintiffs to establish both the causal link ("moving force") and the city's degree of

culpability ("deliberate indifference") to federally protected rights. According to the Court, these requirements must not be diluted, for "[w]here a court fails to adhere to rigorous requirements of culpability and causation, municipal liability collapses into respondeat superior liability." *Id.*

Accordingly, the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals has demanded that plaintiffs seeking to impose § 1983 liability on local governments pursuant to the theory of deliberate indifference must satisfy a stringent standard of proof. For example, in *Gold v. City of Miami*, 151 F.3d 1346 (11th Cir. 1998), the Eleventh Circuit held that the police department was not deliberately indifferent to the plaintiff's constitutional rights when he was wrongfully arrested pursuant to Florida's disorderly conduct statute and the arresting officers refused to loosen the plaintiff's handcuffs in response to the plaintiff's complaints. The court noted that it "repeatedly has held that without notice of a need to train or supervise in a particular area, a municipality is not liable as a matter of law for any failure to train and supervise." *Id.* As Gold was unable to present any evidence of prior constitutional violations or false arrests under the disorderly conduct statute, or of any prior incidents in which a city police officer caused an injury by excessive force in handcuffing, his claim failed. *See id.* at 1354.

Similarly, in *Brooks v. Scheib*, 813 F.2d 1191 (11th Cir. 1987) the Eleventh Circuit reversed and remanded for entry of judgment in favor of the City of Atlanta on Brooks' claim that he had been deprived of his constitutional right to be free from excessive force because the City had failed to adequately supervise Officer Scheib, the officer who had arrested Brooks. Even though there had been ten citizen complaints about Officer

Scheib, the court held that the city did not have any notice of past police misconduct because the plaintiff "never demonstrated that past complaints of police misconduct had any merit." *Id.* at 1193. The court went so far as to state: "Indeed, the number of complaints bears no relation to their validity." *Id. See also Popham v. City of Talladega*, 908 F.2d 1561 (11th Cir. 1990) (finding no liability to train when no pattern of incidents puts the city on notice of a need to train).

1. Deliberate Indifference

Pursuant to the authorities discussed above, the Court has examined whether the Plaintiff in this case presented evidence from which a reasonable fact finder could conclude that the City was deliberately indifferent to the rights of its citizens to be free from the use of excessive force by failing to adequately train or supervise its police officers. Again, as stated by the Supreme Court in *City of Canton:* "Only where a failure to train reflects 'deliberate' or 'conscious' choice by a municipality — a 'policy' as defined by our prior cases — can a city be liable for such a failure under § 1983." *City of Canton*, 489 U.S. at 388-89. *See also Gold*, 151 F.3d at 1346. Moreover, it is well settled in this Circuit that, as a matter of law, a municipality is not liable for any failure to train or supervise without notice of a need to train or supervise in a particular area. *See City of Canton*, 489 U.S. at 378.[15] Thus, in

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15. *See also Church v. City of Huntsville*, 30 F.3d 1332 (11th Cir. 1994) (plaintiffs not likely to succeed on merits of failure-to-train claim without proof that City was aware of prior incident in which constitutional rights were similarly violated); *Wright v. Sheppard*, 919 F.2d 665 (11th Cir. 1990) (sheriff's department not liable for

(Cont'd)

order to establish deliberate indifference, Plaintiff must have presented evidence that the BBPD knew that it needed to better supervise its officers with respect to deadly force, and that it made a deliberate choice not to take any action. *See Gold*, 151 F.3d at 1350-51 (citing *Brown*, 117 S. Ct. at 1390-91).

Plaintiff presented no evidence of incidents other than her own where deadly force was used improperly or where unnecessary force was used by BBPD officers that would have put the City on notice that its supervision of officers was inadequate.[16] Instead, Plaintiff argues that BBPD's training and supervision program was inadequate because, contrary to national policing standards,[17] BBPD failed to

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(Cont'd)

deputy's acts when "no evidence of a history of widespread prior abuse . . . put the sheriff on notice of the need for improved training or supervision."); *Popham*, 908 F.2d at 1564-65; *Brooks*, 813 F.2d at 1191.

16. The Task Force Report references an incident wherein Officer Blum was suspended for holding a gun to the head of a suspect during questioning. This reference is the sole evidence in the record concerning other incidents where there was actually a finding of the use of excessive or unnecessary force, but it is unclear from the report when the incident occurred. The Plaintiff also presented no evidence of citizen complaints that any officers in the BBPD used excessive or unnecessary force or that excessive or unnecessary force was customarily employed by the BBPD.

17. The failure to conform to national policing standards is relevant to whether the City was negligent, but is not probative of deliberate indifference. *See Reed v. Hoy*, 909 F.2d 324, 331 (9th Cir. 1989), *cert. denied*, 501 U.S. 1250 (1991).

maintain logs such as citizen complaint logs, internal affairs logs, failed to have an "early warning system" that required certain types of internal reporting, and failed to conduct its internal investigations in a more thorough manner. According to Harms, these deficiencies could have created a zone of tolerance in which the use of excessive force was condoned by the City. That argument fails, however, because there was no objective evidence presented that the BBPD intended or deliberately chose to create a zone of tolerance, that a zone of tolerance actually existed in the BBPD, or that the identified deficiencies actually resulted in the use of excessive force. In other words, there was no evidence presented to the jury that the City knew of the alleged shortcomings or the potential results of such deficiencies and deliberately chose to ignore them. Similarly, no evidence was presented that there actually was a problem with the use of excessive, unnecessary or deadly force in the BBPD which the City ignored.[18] Thus, there was no evidence presented from which a rational jury could have concluded that the City was deliberately indifferent to the Plaintiff's constitutional rights.

In reaching this conclusion, the undersigned has considered that, hypothetically, "in a narrow range of circumstances," a violation of federal rights may be a highly predictable consequence of a failure to equip law enforcement officers with specific tools to handle recurring situations. *See Brown*, 117 S. Ct. at 1391 (holding that isolated incident of sheriff's inadequate screening of deputy did not create such an obvious risk that it alone established the municipality's deliberate

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18. Even the task force found that the minority community's perception that unnecessary force was being used by the BBPD in the Cherry Hills area was unfounded.

indifference to the risk that the deputy would use excessive force).[19] For example, a plaintiff in a different case might be able to argue successfully that a complete failure to train or supervise police officers in the use of firearms would pose so obvious a risk that it would constitute deliberate indifference on the part of government to the constitutional rights of its citizens to be free from the use of excessive force without the need for the presentation of additional evidence. That hypothetical, however, is distinguishable from the facts here. In this case, the evidence was undisputed that BBPD officers were trained in the use of firearms and in the use of force generally, that they were supervised, albeit not to Harms' satisfaction, and that the City had no objective basis for questioning the efficacy of its training and supervision programs. As quoted by the Eleventh Circuit in Gold, "Unlike the risk from a particular glaring omission in a training regimen, the risk from these possible [record-keeping] imperfections, if any, in the City police officers' training and supervision here is not obvious in the abstract." Gold, 151 F.3d at 1352 (quoting Brown, 117 S. Ct. at 1391) (internal quotations omitted).

2. Causation

Moreover, assuming *arguendo* that Plaintiff proved the existence of a policy or custom of failing to adequately train,

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19. In *City of Canton*, the Supreme Court in dictum left open the question of whether the need to train could be so obvious that evidence of prior incidents would not be required to establish a city *policy*. *See City of Canton*, 489 U.S. at 390 (giving as an example the obvious need to train police officers on the constitutional limitations on the use of deadly force). Subsequently, in *Brown*, the Court explained it was merely hypothesizing such a result in a "narrow range of circumstances." *Brown*, 117 S. Ct. at 1391.

supervise or discipline BBPD officers in the use of excessive or deadly force, Plaintiff was also required to establish that such policy or custom was the "moving force" behind Defendants Loughnan's and Beucler's use of excessive force against the Plaintiff. *See Monell*, 436 U.S. at 694-95. In *City of Canton*, the Supreme Court explained that a policy or custom is a "moving force" only where "a direct causal link" between the relevant policy and the constitutional deprivation can be demonstrated. *See City of Canton*, 489 U.S. at 385. Thus, the Court stated the relevant inquiry to be: "Would the injury have been avoided had the employee been trained under a program that was not deficient in the identified respect?" *Id.*

Plaintiff, in her opposition memorandum, argues that Harms' testimony was sufficient to create a jury issue on causation. Specifically, she argues that the jury could have found the requisite causal connection based upon his testimony concerning the "widened zone of tolerance" within BBPD due to the lack of documentation concerning citizen complaints, internal affairs investigations, and early warning systems. *See* Plaintiff's Memorandum, p. 8. However, there are at least three fatal flaws with Plaintiffs position. First, Harms was unable to say that such a zone of tolerance actually existed in the City; rather, he could only say that the lax record keeping and other deficiencies that he noted "could" create a zone of tolerance in which misconduct was tolerated. Second, there was no evidence that such a zone of tolerance existed within the BBPD or that the conduct of Defendants Loughnan and Beucler in shooting Willingham had been influenced by it. Third, and most important, there was no evidence that the shooting would have been prevented if the City maintained all of the records and otherwise conducted its

business in accordance with Harms' standards. In the absence of such evidence, Plaintiff's claim against the City must fail.

In reaching this conclusion, the Court has considered *Vineyard v. County of Murray, Ga.*, 990 F.2d 1207 (11th Cir. 1993), *cert. denied*, 114 S. Ct. 636 (1993), upon which Plaintiff relies. *Vineyard*, however, is not controlling because it is easily distinguishable from the facts of this case. In *Vineyard*, the county had no policy and procedures manual, did not require deputies to file arrest reports after beatings or confrontations occurred, did not log citizens' complaints, and did not investigate any complaints. Based on that evidence, the Court found the evidence sufficient to allow a jury to find the county's policies to be the "moving force" behind the deputies' "use of gratuitous force" in beating the plaintiff repeatedly. *Id.* at 1213. In contrast, although the evidence in this case shows the City's training and supervision programs might have been improved, the BBPD had written policies and procedures, and trained and supervised its officers with respect to the use of all types of force, including deadly force. *Compare Gold*, 151 F.3d at 1346.

Brooks v. Scheib, 813 F.2d 1191, 1195 (11th Cir. 1987) is factually more similar to this case. In *Brooks*, the Court held that the plaintiff failed to establish that any city policy deprived him of his civil rights because of his failure to adduce any evidence "from which a jury could infer that these allegedly deficient procedures were the 'moving force of the constitutional violations.' " *Id.* at 1195 (quoting *Polk County v. Dodson*, 454 U.S. 312, 326 (1981)). The plaintiff in *Brooks* alleged that the city's handling of citizens' complaints of police misconduct led to the violation of his civil rights when

he was involved in an altercation with a police officer against whom other citizens' complaints had been filed. The Court found, however, that the plaintiff never demonstrated that the city officials were aware of past police misconduct or that a different procedure for processing citizens' complaints would have prevented plaintiff's injuries. There was insufficient evidence that the city's policies were deficient in not requiring that past complaints about officers be brought to the attention of investigators evaluating new complaints, in failing to require officers be given polygraphs about complaints, and in failing to require that citizens be given a role in reviewing complaints. *Id.* at 1193-95. The Court held that the plaintiff "fails to establish the causal element — the 'affirmative link' between the procedures for investigating citizens' complaints and Scheib's deprivation of Brooks' constitutional rights — necessary to prove a § 1983 claim." *Id.* at 1195 (citing *Rizzo v. Goode*, 423 U.S. 362, 371 (1976)). The Court continued that the plaintiff produced "no evidence that different procedures for processing citizens' complaints would have resulted in Officer Scheib being disciplined. Brooks was obligated to produce some evidence that the complaints against Scheib had some merit and that more effective citizens' complaint procedures would have prevented his injuries." *Id.*

Willingham puts forth a theory similar to the plaintiff's theory in *Brooks*. Her "zone of tolerance" theory presupposes that the City's poor supervision, assuming it was proven, resulted in the violation of her civil rights because the officers knew there would be no consequences for their actions. The evidence falls short of proving causation, however, absent evidence that different procedures would have prevented her

injuries. *See id.* As the Plaintiff was unable to produce such evidence, the Plaintiff failed to prove an essential element of her claim against the City under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

V. *CONCLUSION*

Based on the foregoing, it is hereby ORDERED AND ADJUDGED as follows:

1) Defendants' Motion for New Trial is DENIED.

2) Defendants' Motion for Remittitur is DENIED.

3) Defendant Loughnan's and Beucler's Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law is DENIED. The stay of execution as to the Judgment against these Defendants is lifted.

4) Defendant City of Boynton Beach's Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law is GRANTED. The jury's verdict against Defendant City of Boynton Beach in the amount of $5,000,000 is set aside and DISMISSED. Judgment is entered in favor of the City of Boynton Beach.

DONE AND ORDERED in Chambers at Miami, Florida, this 30 day of November, 1998.

s/ Ursula Ungaro-Benages
URSULA UNGARO-BENAGES
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

APPENDIX C — ORDER OF THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT DENYING PETITION(S) FOR REHEARING DATED AND FILED FEBRUARY 15, 2002

IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT

No. 99-4005-FF

BETTY WILLINGHAM,

Plaintiff-Appellee-Cross-Appellant,

versus

JAMES LOUGHNAN, BRIAN BEUCLER,

Defendants-Appellants-Cross-Appellees.

On Appeal from the United States District Court for the Southern District of Florida

ON PETITION(S) FOR REHEARING AND PETITION(S) FOR REHEARING EN BANC

(Opinion_____, 11th Cir., 19__, ____F.2d____).

Before: EDMONDSON, BLACK and McKAY*, Circuit Judges.

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* Honorable Monroe G. McKay, United States Circuit Judge for the Tenth Circuit, sitting by designation.

Appendix C

PER CURIAM:

The Petition(s) for Rehearing are DENIED and no member of this panel nor other Judge in regular active service on the Court having requested that the Court be polled on rehearing en banc (Rule 35, Federal Rules of Appellate Procedure; Eleventh Circuit Rule 35-5), the Petition(s) for Rehearing En Banc are DENIED.

ENTERED FOR THE COURT:

s/ K. Edmondson
UNITED STATES CIRCUIT JUDGE

APPENDIX D — OPINION OF THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT DATED AND FILED SEPTEMBER 2, 1997

IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT

No. 96-4714

D. C. Docket No. 90-8156-CIV-UNGARO-BENAGES

BETTY WILLINGHAM,

Plaintiff-Appellee,

versus

JAMES LOUGHNAN, BRIAN BUECLER,

Defendants-Appellants.

Appeals from the United States District Court
for the Southern District of Florida

(September 2, 1997)

Before ANDERSON, DUBINA and CARNES, Circuit Judges.

PER CURIAM:

Appellants Loughnan and Beucler, who are police officers, appeal the district court's denial of their motion for summary judgment on the basis of qualified immunity. Although appellants seek to rely upon plaintiff's prior

conviction of attempted second degree murder, we decline to address any issue of collateral estoppel or issue preclusion because appellants did not present the criminal trial transcript to the district court in support of their motion for summary judgment, nor did they include said transcript in the record on appeal. In the absence of any issue preclusion, and in the summary judgment posture of this case, we must accept as true plaintiff's version of the relevant facts. According to plaintiff, she was shot when she was merely standing in the doorway of her house, screaming and pulling her hair and posing no threat to anyone. If the officers fired on plaintiff even though she was posing no threat to anyone, they would have violated clearly-established law.[1]

AFFIRMED.

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1. Because appellants failed to present to the district court an argument based on *Heck v. Humphrey*, 512 U.S. 477, 114 S.Ct. 2364 (1994), we decline to entertain any such argument raised for the first time on appeal.

APPENDIX E — OMNIBUS ORDER OF THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA DATED MAY 3, 1996

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF FLORIDA

Case No. 90-8156-CIV-UNGARO-BENAGES

BETTY WILLINGHAM,

Plaintiff,

vs.

JAMES LOUGHNAN, et al.,

Defendants.

OMNIBUS ORDER

THIS CAUSE came before the Court upon Defendants' Motion for Summary Judgment filed November 6, 1995 (D.E. 178) and Plaintiff's Motion to Strike Defendants' Motion for Summary Judgment filed November 24, 1995 (D.E. 187).

THE COURT has considered that Motions, responses and the pertinent portions of the record, and being otherwise fully advised in the premises, it is

ORDERED AND ADJUDGED the following:

Appendix E

(1) that the Motion for Summary Judgment is hereby DENIED. It appears from a careful review of the motion, filings and attachments that there remain in dispute genuine issues of material fact regarding the circumstances involved in the incident at question — and thus the applicability of qualified immunity to this case. Hence the moving parties are not entitled to summary judgment as a matter of law. Fed. R. Civ. P. 56; Celotex Corp. v. Catrett, 477 U.S. 317 (1986). Furthermore, as Plaintiff points out, summary judgment was previously denied on the issue of qualified immunity on March 9, 1993, for this same reason, and the Court remains convinced that further evidence proffered in the case has not served to resolve the factual disputes; and

(2) that the Motion to Strike is hereby DENIED AS MOOT.

DONE AND ORDERED in Chambers at Miami, Florida, this 3 day of May, 1996.

s/ Ursula Ungaro-Benages
URSULA UNGARO-BENAGES
UNITED STATES DISTRICT JUDGE

No. 01-1693

Supreme Court, U.S.
FILED
JUN 19 2002

In The

Supreme Court of the United States

BETTY WILLINGHAM,

Petitioner,

v.

JAMES LOUGHNAN AND BRIAN BUECLER,

Respondents.

On Petition For A Writ Of Certiorari To The United States Court Of Appeals For The Eleventh Circuit

RESPONDENTS' BRIEF IN OPPOSITION

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QUESTIONS PRESENTED FOR REVIEW

1. Whether state officials sued individually under 42 U.S.C. §1983 are entitled to qualified immunity unless they have violated statutory or constitutional rights "clearly established" by a case presenting facts "materially similar" to those in the plaintiff's case?

2. Whether an interlocutory appeal denying a state official's claim to qualified immunity constitutes the law of the case so as to preclude further consideration of this claim on a subsequent appeal?

3. Whether the law of the case doctrine is necessarily inconsistent with the law of qualified immunity, so that a second appellate panel is always free, following a final adverse judgment, to award qualified immunity to a government official?

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STATEMENT OF THE CASE

On October 7, 1987, just before midnight, Petitioner Betty Willingham, was simultaneously shot by Boynton Beach, Florida police Officers James Loughnan and Brian Buecler after having committed a battery on Officer Loughnan and within a split-second of having attempted to murder Officer Ron Panucci, who was attempting to arrest her brother, Arnold Sims.

According to the officers, who testified at her criminal and civil trial, she had a long blade kitchen knife in her hand and was attempting to stab Pannuci in the back at the time she was shot. An independent witness testified at both trials that she was on the step outside her house with an object in her hand at the time she was shot. Willingham claimed that she was standing in the doorway, pulling her hair at the time she was shot. Her version of the events was rejected when she was convicted in June 1989 of both crimes by the criminal court jury, a conviction that was neither appealed nor vacated.

In 1990, Willingham sued the City of Boynton Beach, its police chief Edward Hillery and Officers James Loughnan and Brian Buecler. After the officers moved for summary judgment on the sole state law claims against them in 1992, Plaintiff amended her complaint to bring federal

civil rights claims against them. The officers' summary judgment on the state law claims was denied in 1993.[1]

The officers moved for summary judgment on the federal claim of excessive force in 1995, asserting qualified immunity. In 1996, the district court denied the motion finding that there was a factual dispute not specified in the order and upon the misapprehension that there had been a previous denial of the motion. The officers took an interlocutory appeal to the Eleventh Circuit. Petitioner's motion to dismiss the appeal as frivolous was denied and a stay order denied by district court was granted.

In September 1997, The Eleventh Circuit, in an unpublished opinion, affirmed the denial of the motion for summary judgment due to the claimed factual dispute of whether Plaintiff was doing nothing at the time she was shot or was attempting to murder an officer. In the panel's view, the issue preclusion argument was not properly presented for review.

After the district court again denied the officers' motions for judgment on qualified immunity at trial and post-trial, an appeal was lodged to the Eleventh Circuit of the 5.5 million dollar verdict rendered against the officer by a jury in Dade County.[2] Upon review of the entire record, including the criminal trial transcript and proceedings (as had the district court when it decided the officer's post-trial motion for judgment) the Eleventh Circuit

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[1] These claims were eventually dropped by Plaintiff at the commencement of trial.

[2] The judgment against the City of Boynton Beach for 5 million dollars was set aside by the district court and affirmed on appeal. Petitioner does not seek review of that decision.

properly found that the criminal conviction at a minimum established that Plaintiff was shot within a "split-second" of having attempted to murder one police officer and battering another and was not restrained and potentially in a position to continue her assaults on the police.

Finding that there was no materially similar controlling precedent in 1987, determining that the use of force by these officers under the circumstances presented to them was unlawful, and that there existed a number of decisions finding that such conduct was lawful, the court determined that qualified immunity was applicable to bar the claim against the officers.

Petitioner's suggestion for re-hearing en banc was denied as a motion for rehearing by the panel. No request was made by a judge of the court to poll the judges on the suggestion of rehearing en banc.

REASONS FOR DENYING THE WRIT

PREFACE

At the outset, it should be noted that the "Questions Presented for Review" are juxtaposed to somewhat different questions presented in Petitioner's table of contents and brief. The face page contains three questions; the table of contents brief only addresses two questions.

The first question is raised for hopeful joinder with one of the questions pending decision before the Court in *Hope v. Pelzer,* No. 01-309, 122 S. Ct. 802 (2002) as to whether the "materially similar" requirement is too stringent. However, Petitioner transforms this issue to assert that the Court of Appeals requires prior decisional

law to be "virtually identical"; a position not adopted in any decision of the Eleventh Circuit, nor any other Court of Appeals.

The second question presented is changed from whether the law-of-the-case doctrine could be ignored in deciding succeeding appeals on qualified immunity to one claiming that the Eleventh Circuit has rejected the doctrine when dealing with qualified immunity, allegedly contrary to the view of other Courts of Appeals.

I. The questions presented for review were not timely raised or decided in the district or circuit court below.

Neither question nor issue was timely pressed or decided by the courts below. In the Court of Appeals, Petitioner's response brief makes no argument nor cites any case in support of the proposition that there was circuit precedent prior to 1987 that clearly established that a reasonable officer would know that the officer's conduct violated constitutional law. Nor did Petitioner argue that there was a case that was materially similar or that should have given "fair warning." [*See* Respondents' Appendix].

Indeed, not one of the cases relied upon by Petitioner herein is cited as authority in her response brief in the Court of Appeals. Petitioner did rely upon *U.S. v. Katz,* 194 F.3d 962 (9th Cir. 1999) for the proposition that there was no qualified immunity in excessive force cases. *Katz* was reversed by this Court in rejecting that argument. *See Saucier v. Katz,* 533 U.S. 194, 121 S. Ct. 2151, 150 L. Ed. 2d 272 (2001).

Nor did Petitioner argue that there was a conclusive, factual denial of qualified immunity by the Eleventh Circuit before trial that was the "law-of-the-case." Thus, it is not "remarkable" that the doctrine was not mentioned in the Court of Appeals' opinion. Indeed, all that Petitioner concluded was that the district court was correct in denying qualified immunity post-trial. [*See* Respondents' Appendix].

Petitioner did raise the "law-of-the-case" argument in her "Suggestion of Rehearing En Banc" served on August 31, 2001. Also raised was the argument that there allegedly was materially similar precedent that was overlooked. The claimed issue that the materially similar precedent standard is too stringent was not raised. The petition for rehearing was denied without briefing or opinion. [Pet. App. C].

Thus, certiorari should not be granted because the issues presented for review were neither timely presented nor decided in the Court of Appeals. *City of Springfield, Mass. v. Kibbe*, 480 U.S. 257, 259, 107 S. Ct. 1114, 1115, 94 L. Ed. 2d 293 (1987) ("We ordinarily will not decide questions not raised or litigated in the lower courts. See *California v. Taylor,* 353 U.S. 553, 556, n. 2, 77 S. Ct. 1037, 1039, n. 2, 1 L. Ed. 2d 1034 (1957).")

II. The doctrine of materially similar precedent does not contradict fair warning nor differ from other circuit authority.

Petitioner's argument is premised upon the flawed assumption and conclusion that there is a requirement of "virtual identity" to the facts in a precedent case before qualified immunity is surrendered. Indeed, this argument

is merely a repetition of one fashioned by *amici* ACLU in *Hope*, and is not based upon any reported decision of the Eleventh Circuit.

Petitioner does not argue here that there was a materially similar decision that the Court of Appeals overlooked or failed to follow in reaching its conclusion. The heart of *Hope v. Pelzer* is that the Eleventh Circuit found that although the use of the "hitching post" was an Eighth Amendment violation, the prior decision of the predecessor Fifth Circuit, handed down twenty-one years prior to the conduct at issue, was not so substantially similar to provide "fair warning" to the prison guards that their conduct in following prison rules was a constitutional violation.

Indeed, Petitioner's main focus in her response to the officers' appeal below was that there was no qualified immunity in an excessive force claim based upon Ninth Circuit precedent. However, as noted in the decision below, that position was rejected by the Court last term in *Saucier v. Katz, supra*.

Petitioner's principal reliance is upon *United States. v. Lanier*, 520 U.S. 259, 117 S. Ct. 1219, 137 L. Ed. 2d 432 (1997). In *Lanier*, certiorari was granted to review the standard for determining whether particular conduct falls within the range of *criminal liability* under 18 U.S.C. § 242, not to determine the standard for determining qualified immunity. In *Lanier*, the Sixth Circuit had found that

> criminal liability may be imposed under § 242 only if the constitutional right said to have been violated is first identified in a decision of this Court (not any other federal, or state court), and

> only when the right has been held to apply in "a factual situation fundamentally similar to the one at bar." 73 F.3d at 1393. The Court of Appeals regarded these combined requirements as "substantially higher than the 'clearly established' standard used to judge qualified immunity" in civil cases under Rev. Stat. § 1979, 42 U.S.C. § 1983. 73 F.3d, at 1393. 520 U.S. at 263.

For sure, analogies were drawn by the Court to the standards of conduct similarities to civil and criminal liability of state actors. However, *Lanier* does not depart from the previous well-established principles of *Anderson v. Creighton*, 483 U.S. 635, 639-40 (1987) and *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 528, 105 S. Ct. 2806, 2816, 86 L. Ed. 2d 411 (1985). As this Court explained,

> This is not to say, of course, that the single warning standard points to a single level of specificity sufficient in every instance. In some circumstances, as when an earlier case expressly leaves open whether a general rule applies to the particular type of conduct at issue, a very high degree of prior factual particularity may be necessary. See, *e.g., Mitchell v. Forsyth, supra,* at 530-535, and n. 12, 105 S. Ct., at 2817-2820, and n. 12.

Lanier, 520 U.S. at 271.

Lanier has not been construed to eliminate the requirement that a plaintiff who seeks to defeat qualified immunity in such cases cannot just allege violation of an "abstract" or "general right," but must show that the constitutional right he asserts was clearly established in a "particularized, and hence more relevant, sense." *Anderson v. Creighton*, 483 U.S. 635, 639-40 (1987). *Mitchell v. Forsyth*, 472 U.S. 511, 528, 105 S. Ct. 2806, 2816, 86

L. Ed. 2d 411 (1985) (officials are immune unless "the law clearly proscribed the actions" they took).

The Court of Appeals has not ignored *Lanier*. In *Marsh v. Butler County, Ala.*, 268 F.3d 1014, 1032-1033 (11th Cir. 2001) (en banc), the court addressed issues raised by *Lanier*. In note 9, the court noted

> We acknowledge that preexisting case law, tied to the precise facts, is not in every situation essential to establish clearly the law applying to the circumstances facing a public official so that a reasonable official would be put on fair and clear notice that specific conduct would be unlawful in the faced, specific circumstances. *See United States v. Lanier*, 520 U.S. 259, 117 S. Ct. 1219, 1227, 137 L. Ed. 2d 432 (1997) ("[A] general constitutional rule already identified in the decisional law may apply with obvious clarity to the specific conduct in question.") (discussing 18 U.S.C. § 242); *Lassiter*, 28 F.3d at 1150 n. 4 (leaving open possibility that "occasionally the words of a federal statute or federal constitutional provision will be specific enough to establish the law applicable to particular circumstances clearly and to overcome qualified immunity even in the absence of case law");
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> . . . .
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> Some general statements of law are capable of giving fair and clear warning in some circumstances: the occasional "obvious clarity" cases per *Lanier*. But in other cases, as *Lanier* says, "a very high degree of prior factual particularity may be necessary." 117 S. Ct. at 1227. Especially where the applicable legal standard is a highly general one, such as "to act reasonably" or "to act with probable cause," preexisting case law, that has

> applied the general law to specific circumstances, will almost always be necessary to draw the bright line that is capable of honestly giving fair and clear notice that an official's conduct will violate federal law. *See Anderson,* 107 S. Ct. at 3040 (noting that pertinent qualified immunity question in probable-cause case is "fact-specific" question of whether a reasonable official could have believed, in light of clearly established law, that official's behavior was lawful under circumstances)
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> . . . .
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> *See also Saucier v. Katz,* 533 U.S. 194, 121 S. Ct. 2151, 2156, 150 L. Ed. 2d 272 (2001) ("This inquiry [whether a legal right was already clearly established], it is vital to note, must be undertaken in light of the specific context of the case, not as a broad general proposition"); *Wilson v. Layne,* 526 U.S. 603, 119 S. Ct. 1692, 1699-1700, 143 L. Ed. 2d 818 (1999) (saying "the right allegedly violated must be defined at the appropriate level of specificity. . . . ").

Marsh, 268 F.3d at 1032-1033.

The Eleventh Circuit has not adopted a "virtually identical" rule in addressing qualified immunity. Clearly, the Court of Appeals has found that "[O]ccasionally the words of a federal statute or federal constitutional provision will be specific enough to establish law applicable to particular circumstances clearly and to overcome qualified immunity even in the absence of case law." *Lassiter v. Alabama A&M University*, 28 F.3d 1146, 1150 n. 4 (11th Cir. 1994). As recognized in *Marsh*, the Court of Appeals has held that an official may stray "so far beyond the hazy border between constitutional and unconstitutional

conduct" that the official "had to know he was violating the Constitution even without case law on point." *Priester v. City of Riviera Beach*, 208 F.3d 919, 926 (11th Cir. 2000) (quoting *Smith v. Mattox*, 127 F.3d 1416, 1419 (11th Cir. 1997)). 268 F.3d at 1032. This view is not substantially different from that of *Brokaw v. Mercer County*, 235 F.3d 1000, 1022 (7th Cir. 2000) (conduct so severe and egregious and the right violated was so "obvious").

Indeed, the other circuit authority cited by Petitioner does not conflict with Eleventh Circuit views. *Brokaw v. Mercer County, supra*, *Buonocore v. Harris*, 65 F.3d 347 (4th Cir. 1995) and *Ayeni v. Mottola*, 35 F.3d 680, 686 (2nd Cir. 1994) do not discuss whether fair warning is a more appropriate standard than materially similar precedent.

Buoncore and *Mottola* were grounded upon the supposed bed-rock warrant principles that federal law enforcement officers should have known. However, this Court in 1999, in *Wilson v. Layne* 526 U.S. 603 (1999), resolved a split among the circuits on these principles by finding media ride-alongs violative of the Fourth Amendment. However, the Court also held that those principles were not clearly established in 1992, to defeat the officer's qualified immunity.

Moreover, in *Wilson*, decided two years after *Lanier*, this Court referred to *Lanier*, but found the principles of *Anderson* still controlling,

> In *Anderson*, we explained that what "clearly established" means in this context depends largely "upon the level of generality at which the relevant 'legal rule' is to be identified." 483 U.S., at 639, 107 S. Ct. 3034. "[C]learly established" for purposes of qualified immunity means that

> "[t]he contours of the right must be sufficiently clear that a reasonable official would understand that what he is doing violates that right. This is not to say that an official action is protected by qualified immunity unless the very action in question has previously been held unlawful, but it is to say that in the light of pre-existing law the unlawfulness must be apparent." *Id.*, at 640, 107 S. Ct. 3034 (citations omitted); see also *United States v. Lanier*, 520 U.S. 259, 270, 117 S. Ct. 1219, 137 L. Ed. 2d 432 (1997).

Wilson, 526 U.S. at 614-615.

Though it was contended that right was obvious, the Court noted that " . . . although media ride-alongs of one sort or another had apparently become a common police practice, in 1992 there were no judicial opinions holding that this practice became unlawful when it entered a home." *Id.* 526 U.S. at 616. Thus, the importance of pre-existing judicial precedent was re-emphasized.

Similar to *Wilson v. Layne*, the Court of Appeals reluctantly agreed that the civil trial verdict could be viewed as finding the officers' conduct violative of the Fourth Amendment. However, as in *Wilson*, this did not defeat their entitlement to qualified immunity.

III. The law-of-the-case doctrine has not been rejected by the Eleventh Circuit in qualified immunity cases, nor was it applicable below.

Once again, Petitioner's argument is based upon a faulty premise of a self-created argument. The Eleventh Circuit's first unpublished decision on qualified immunity was addressed by both the district court and the circuit court opinions. [Pet. App. A & B]. The decision was based

upon the fact that there were material issues in dispute, which has long been a basis for denying qualified immunity prior to trial. Such a basis has not been found to have preclusive effect on further reconsideration of the defense at trial.

In this case, the seminal issue was timing. Prior to trial it was not established as to whether Willingham was shot after everything was over or whether the use of force was an integral part of the event. Indeed, as noted several times in the opinion of the Court of Appeals, Willingham testified at trial that she was shot within a "split second" of throwing a knife at Panucci and raising her hands into the air. Moreover, it was established at trial that the entire event occurred within 90 seconds, clearly calling for the sort of "split-second" judgments of the officers envisioned by *Graham v. Connor*, 109 S. Ct. 1865, 1872 (1989).

It was only two years before this incident that *Tennesse v. Garner*, 105 S. Ct., 1694, 1701 (1985) decided that the use of deadly force was lawful where the officer "has probable cause to believe the suspect poses a threat of serious physical harm, either to the officers or others." *Id.*

Moreover, the criminal court transcript had not been presented nor reviewed by either the district or circuit court to determine the parameters of the preclusive effect of the criminal conviction. After its presentation at trial, it was given some weight by the district court. However, the full legal import was only correctly recognized by the Court of Appeals.

Indeed, the first unpublished decision of the Court of Appeals did not make a judicial finding of fact. The District Court, in denying summary judgment, found that "there remain in dispute genuine issue of material fact

regarding the circumstances involved in the incident in question – and thus the applicability of qualified immunity to the case." [Pet. App E, p. 69a]. The Court of Appeals, in affirming this finding, stated that since it declined to address the preclusive effect of the criminal conviction without having the criminal court transcript to review, if Plaintiff's version of the facts were accepted and "*[I]f* the officer fired on plaintiff even though she was posing no threat to anyone, *they would have* violated clearly established law." [Pet. App. D, p. 67a]. (emphasis supplied).

This does not establish that the officers were not entitled to qualified immunity under the facts of the case – it was nothing more than an opinion that **IF** those facts which Plaintiff claims are in dispute are the ultimate facts and that the criminal trial transcript and conviction are not considered, then there would be no entitlement to qualified immunity.[3] However, as the Court of Appeals addressed in detail, the facts at trial and the review of the criminal trial transcript and judgment show that there was clear entitlement to qualified immunity. Petitioner does not argue that the facts were the same at the motion for summary judgment stage as at trial.

Petitioner's reliance on *Tonkovich v. Kansas Board of Regents*, 254 F.3d 941 (10th Cir. 2001) is inapposite. Therein, the district court granted qualified immunity at the Rule 12(b)(6) dismissal stage, which was affirmed by the Tenth Circuit on *de novo* review. The complaint was amended to assert a new federal claim. Again dismissal

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[3] For example, the testimony of Charles Brown, Josh Rahming, Leon Jacobs and Bruce Raticoff were profferred in opposition to the motion for summary judgment, but not presented at trial.

was granted under Rule 12(b)(6), because the previous panel decision found "no set of facts in support of his claim which would entitle him to relief and that the complaint must therefore be dismissed pursuant to Rule 12(b)(6)." *Id.* 254 F.3d at 944. Thus, the first decision was followed because it found that there were no federal claims to be brought under the facts alleged. This hardly supports Petitioner's argument that a denial of qualified immunity because of disputed facts precludes further consideration.

In *Veneklase v. City of Fargo*, 248 F.3d 738 (8th Cir. 2001), the district court concluded that the officers' conduct was not "objectively reasonable" in light of clearly established law. *Id.* at 741. This determination was reversed by the circuit court and qualified immunity was granted. *Veneklase v. City of Fargo*, 78 F.3d 1264, 1270 (8th Cir. 1996) (*"Veneklase I"*). The case was remanded for determination of City liability since it was not the proper subject of an interlocutory appeal. There was no issue of qualified immunity in the second appeal – thus no discussion of any preclusive effect of the determination to *grant qualified immunity*.

In *McCloud v. Testa*, 97 F.3d 1536 (6th Cir. 1996) the Sixth Circuit's analysis of its prior opinion was similar to that of the Eleventh Circuit in the decision below. The Sixth Circuit found that

> Uncertainty about the actual duties of these positions, when their inherent nature is not apparent (no parties to this suit have cited any helpful state or county law defining the duties of the positions), precludes us from reversing the district court's determination. We emphasize that qualified immunity may become available to Testa with respect to any of these positions as

> the facts are crystallized or the relevant state/county law is developed before the district court at any time up to or including the conclusion of trial. Our current disposition of this case does not prevent the district court from granting qualified immunity to Testa with respect to any of these positions.

McCloud, 97 F.3d at 1561, 1562.

Petitioner's reliance on the ultimate sentence that as to one argument that the law was clearly established to deny qualified immunity is sorely misplaced as there is ultimately no discussion of the "law-of-the-case" doctrine in support of that determination.

In *Kimberlin v. Quinlan*, 199 F.3d 496 (D.C. Cir. 2000) the individual defendants moved for summary judgment on qualified immunity which was denied by the district court, finding that "the law was clearly established that prison officials could not interfere with prisoners first amendment right to access to the press." This issue was not appealed, but qualified immunity was granted by the circuit court, but reversed by the Supreme Court. When remanded back to the district court, it refused to revisit the issue on a *renewed motion for summary judgment*, relying on its previous decision as being the law of the case, *since that issue had not been appealed.*

In *In re City of Philadelphia*, 158 F.3d 711 (3d Cir. 1998) a prior appeal on summary judgment, which found that city officials were entitled to qualified immunity, had determined that the conduct of city officials constituted a seizure of Plaintiff by the City within the meaning of the Fourth Amendment. Since, as the Third Circuit emphasized, " . . . that because the evidence was at least as

strong at trial on the issue of seizure as it was at the summary judgment stage, our prior ruling that a seizure occurred controls our resolution of this appeal." 158 F.3d at 722. No such finding was made below that the summary judgment evidence was the same as it was at trial. Indeed, the Court of Appeals pointed out the lack of certain evidence caused it not to consider the legal issues.

When considering the motion for summary judgement, the district court did not address clearly established law in its denial of summary judgment, nor did the Court of Appeals. Indeed, as the district court found in its order on post-trial motion for judgment in their favor, "... the officers properly and timely request that the Court revisit this factual issue, the Court still finds that the qualified immunity defense turns on issues of fact that were properly resolved by the jury." [Pet. App. B, p. 30a, n. 4]. The Court of Appeals found this to be error.

Moreover, Plaintiff's claim that the Eleventh Circuit rejects application of the law-of-the-case is meritless. The basis for this assertion is Judge Tjoflat's *dissent* to the *denial of a request for re-hearing en banc* in *Riley v. Camp*, 130 F.3d 958 (11th Cir. 1997). This dissertation has little precedential value in the circuit. *Luckey v. Miller*, 929 F.2d 618, 622 (11th Cir. 1991). Indeed, the opinion is solely that of Judge Tjoflat – the balance of the court apparently agreed with the panel analysis of the law expressed by Judge Birch in his response and Judge Kravitch, in her unpublished dissent, that

> "Under the law of the case doctrine, both the district court and the court of appeals generally are bound by findings of fact and conclusions of law made by the court of appeals in a prior appeal of the same case." *United States v. Robinson*, 690

> F.2d 869, 872 (11th Cir. 1982) (citations omitted). Therefore, the law of the case doctrine bars our reconsideration of the qualified immunity issue. 130 F.3d at 979.

As far back as 1984, the Court of Appeals, in *Wheeler v. City of Pleasant Grove,* 746 F.2d 1437 (11th Cir. 1984), delineated the general contours of law-of-the-case doctrine as above, and noted that there were certain exceptions, including when (1) a subsequent trial produces substantially different evidence, (2) controlling authority has since made a contrary decision of law applicable to the issue, or (3) the prior decision was clearly erroneous and would work manifest injustice. These principles are markedly similar to those discussed by the Third Circuit in *In re City of Philadelphia, supra.*

Most central to the consideration of this doctrine in this case is that in those cases where a motion for summary judgment based on qualified immunity is denied, because the facts are not fully developed, the district court should be free to revisit the qualified immunity question during the post trial to determine whether the facts, as developed at trial, differ from those taken in the light most favorable to the plaintiffs at the summary judgment stage. *See Kelly v. Curtis,* 21 F.3d 1544, 1546 (11th Cir. 1994) (defendants may raise qualified immunity anew at trial in motions for judgment as a matter of law because, "'rulings on summary judgment motions' are 'the facts for present purposes,' but they 'may not be the actual facts.'"); *see also Sims v. Metropolitan Dade County,* 972 F.2d 1230, 1233 (11th Cir. 1992).

If the facts presented by plaintiff at the summary judgment stage become, without notable exception, the "actual facts" as developed at trial, then the qualified

immunity determination, if made at the prior appellate panel, should not be revisited. If however, as here, there truly was no qualified immunity determination made and there was a notable difference as to the facts and development of evidence (e.g., criminal trial transcript introduced; plaintiff admitting she was shot within a split second of throwing a knife) then the defendant's right to raise qualified immunity should be, as it was, preserved.

The Eleventh Circuit's analysis does not differ from that of the other circuits. *See McCloud*, 97 F.3d at 1561, 1562 (qualified immunity may become available as the facts are crystallized or the relevant law is developed before the district court at any time up to or including the conclusion of trial); *In re City of Philadelphia*, 158 F.3d 711, 718 (doctrine does not preclude reconsideration where: (1) new evidence is available; (2) a supervening new law has been announced; or (3) the earlier decision was clearly erroneous and would create manifest injustice).

Nor is it contrary to this Court's holdings. In *Behrens v. Pelletier*, 516 U.S. 299 (1996), the Court found that qualified immunity could be the subject of two *pre-trial* appeals, because the first may be on allegations and the second on actual facts found in discovery.

Contrary to Petitioner's claim, *Oladiende v. City of Birmingham*, 230 F.3d 1275 (11th Cir. 2000) does not reject the application of the "law-of-the-case" doctrine to qualified immunity cases, it merely, after thoughtful, cogent discussion, found it not controlling in the case. Its application, or lack thereof, was one of the first issues discussed, since it was raised by the plaintiff. There is no discussion of the doctrine in the circuit court's opinion

below since the issue was not raised by Petitioner. [*See* Respondents' Appendix].

Similar to the proceedings below in this case, the prior unpublished decision did not delineate established facts and find that there was no entitlement to qualified immunity – it simply found that facts were in dispute. See Pet. App. A, p. 9a, n. 7. As the analysis of the issue of *Oladiende* concluded,

> Where a previous panel has given no explanation for its decision, a subsequent appellate court panel is "not bound by any 'law of the case' unless a determination by us concerning the propriety of [the district court's order] is necessarily inconsistent with every possible correct basis for the earlier rulings of this court." *Key v. Wise,* 629 F.2d 1049, 1054-55 (5th Cir. 1980). One correct basis for this court's earlier ruling is that there remained genuine issues of material fact in dispute requiring a trial as to the police department's interests and the individual defendants' motives in transferring the plaintiffs. Such a ruling would present no binding conclusion of law as to the defendants' qualified immunity, but would simply allow the case to proceed to the jury. A conclusion now, after the facts have been developed at trial, that the defendants are entitled to qualified immunity would not be inconsistent with this possibly correct basis for the earlier ruling of this court.

Oladiende, 230 F.3d at 1289-1290.

Thus, neither *Oladiende* nor Judge Tjoflat's *dissent* to the *denial of a request for hearing en banc* in *Riley v. Camp,* 130 F.3d 958 (11th Cir. 1997) establish that the Eleventh Circuit has adopted a wholesale rejection of the

law-of-the-case doctrine differing from the other circuits in cases considering the defense of qualified immunity. The defense was properly considered and granted.

CONCLUSION

The Petitioner attempts to revive her case anew by raising new issues not timely made in the Court of Appeals in hopes that the suit will be held pending a decision in another matter. The issues in the case below were not similar to those in *Hope v. Pelzer*.

Moreover, the Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit does not hold the views claimed by the Petitioner. Reliance upon a dissent to denial of a petition for rehearing *en banc*, is not controlling precedent in this or any other court.

The petition should be denied.

Respectfully submitted,

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EXCERPTS FROM PETITIONER'S RESPONSE BRIEF AND INITIAL BRIEF ON CROSS APPEAL FILED IN THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT ON MARCH 13, 2000

IN THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS

FOR THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT

NO. 99-4005-F

BETTY WILLINGHAM

PLAINTIFF/APPELLEE/

CROSS-APPELLANT

VERSUS

JAMES LOUGHNAN and BRIAN BEUCLER

DEFENDANTS/APPELLANT/

CROSS-APPELLEE

RESPONSE BRIEF OF APPELLEE

AND

INITIAL BRIEF ON CROSS APPEAL

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A. APPELLANTS VIOLATED THE APPELLEE'S CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS AND THEREFORE, ARE NOT ENTITLED TO QUALIFIED IMMUNITY

Appellants argue that because the Appellee was convicted of attempted second murder, they were within their rights to shoot her eight times. (Appellants' brief, p. 12) In determining whether the conduct of the Appellants was objectively reasonable, the fact that a person was convicted of jaywalking, battery or murder is irrelevant if excessive force was used by the law enforcement officers.

The Supreme Court has held that "[t]he test of reasonableness is an objective one, without regard to the underlying intent or motivation of the officer. The proper question to be asked is whether the officers' actions were objectively reasonable under the facts and circumstances confronting him" *Graham v. Connor,* 109 S.Ct. 1865, 1872

(1989) The jury, by their verdict, determined that Appellants LOUGHNAN and BEUCLER's actions were unreasonable.

In *Dixon v. Richer,* 922 P.2d 1456, 1462 (10th Cir 1991), the court expressed doubts over the use of qualified immunity in the face of an excessive force claim. "[Un-excessive force claims asserted under the fourth amendment, the qualified immunity question is usually answered in the fourth amendment inquiry. This is because in the excessive force context, the fourth amendment inquiry asks directly whether the police officer reasonably could have believed that the force was necessary under the circumstances." *Id.* at p. 1463.

"A government official will be protected from suit if the rights that he allegedly violated were unclear at the time of his-actions or he reasonably believed that what he was doing did not violate clearly established law." *Edwards v. Gilbert,* 867 F.2d 1271 (11th Cir. 1989). See also: *Russell v. Coughlin,* 910 F.2d 75, 78 (2nd cir. 1990). There can be no doubt that excessive use of force violates clearly established law. Based upon the evidence presented by the Appellee, the use of deadly force by the Appellants was unreasonable and unnecessary.

The Appellants cite to *Menuel v. City of Atlanta,* 25 F.3d 990 (11th Cir. 1994) to support their argument that their actions were reasonable under the facts of the instant case. (Appellants' brief, p. 13) In *Menuel,* the defendants believed that the plaintiff was only armed with a knife when they entered her bedroom. Upon entering her bedroom, the plaintiff began firing a gun. The defendants returned fire. A bullet hole was found in the tar wall of the bedroom which supported the defendants contention that the plaintiff had shot at them. In addition, no family

members were witnesses to the shooting. *Id.* at p. 993. In that case, the court held that " . . . the shooting to death of the decedent occurred in response to her discharging a .25 caliber pistol aimed toward a police officer at close range in a darkened room. The officers forcefully entered the bedroom because they believed the decedent was either unarmed or carried only a knife. In sum, the officers seized the decedent by shooting her but, in the circumstances of this case, violated none of her Forth Amendment rights as a result." *Id.* at p. 996.

The facts are in no way analogous to the instant case. The witnesses and the evidence support a finding that the Appellee was unarmed at the time of the shooting.

Appellants at trial argued that they were justified in the use of deadly force, while the Appellee stated that the force utilized was unjustified and excessive. Each side presented evidence to support their viewpoint and it was the jury's determination that the force utilized by the Appellants was unjustified. In *Brandenburg v. Cureton,* 882 F.2d 211 (6th Cir. 1989), a case analogous to the instant case, the plaintiff asserted that the defendant officer had shot the plaintiff-decedent without just cause, while the defendant asserted that he and his fellow officers had shot in self defense. The court in *Brandenburg* stated that while the immunity question is a purely legal question, a court may not be able to make that determination where the exact character of the actions are unknown. *Id.* It went on to hold:

> "In this case, however, the jury becomes the final arbiter of the appellant Sharp's claim of immunity, since the legal question of immunity is completely dependent upon which view of the facts is accepted by the jury. If the jury determines

> that Sharp fired Brandenburg without a belief that someone was in danger of serious bodily injury, then as a legal matter no reasonable officer could believe that such gunfire would not violate another's constitutional rights. On the other hand, if the jury believes detective Sharp's version of the facts, he will be entitled to qualified immunity."

Id. at 215-6.

In the instant case, the jury did not believe the appellants version of what occurred on October 7, 1987, and therefore, they are not entitled to qualified immunity. "The central legal question is whether a reasonably well-trained officer in the defendant's position would have known that shooting the victim was unreasonable under the circumstances." *Soya v. City of Mt. Pleasant,* 142 F.3d 898, 903 (6th Cir. 1998). Qualified immunity is inapplicable where there are contentious factual disputes over the reasonableness of the use of deadly force. *Id.* A jury's finding of excessive force forecloses an officer's immunity defense. *Frazell v. Flanigan,* 102 F.3d 877, 886-87 (7th Cir. 1996). See also: *Ratz v. U.S., et al.,* 194 F.3d 962 (9th Cir. 1999) *Iacobucci v. Boulter,* 193 F.3d 14 (1st Cir. 1999) *Humnhrev v. Staszak,* 148 F.3d 719 (7th Cir. 1998).

The Appellants' reliance upon *Harrell v. Decatur County, Ga.,* 42 F.2d 1494 (11th Cir. 1995), *vacating and adopting dissent* in 22 F.3d 1570 (11th Cir. 1994 is misplaced. (Appellants' brief, p. 15). The issue in *Harrell* was ". . . whether the use of force was constitutionally reasonable under the totality of the circumstances as a means of seizing a dangerous fleeing felon." *Id.* at p. 1579. The evidence presented in the instant case was that at the time of the shooting, BETTY WILLINGHAM had nothing

in her hands except her hair. No reasonable officer would have shot her at that point.

The fact that a person was convicted of a criminal act is irrelevant to the 42 U.S.C. § 1983 claim, if excessive force was used by law enforcement officers at the time of the arrest. *Hernandez v. City of Los Angeles,* 624 F.2d 935 (9th Cir. 1980) *Vasquez v. Metropolitan Dade County,* 968 F.2d 1101 (11th Cir. 1992). to suggest that the instant case is analogous to *Elliot v. Leavitt,* 99 F.3d 640 (4th Cir. 1996) (plaintiff in custody in a police car points a gun at two officers) and *Forrest v. Richardson* 112 F.3d 416 (9th Cir. 1997) (plaintiff who had committed a violent residential burglary and in possession of several firearms and 250 rounds of ammunition is shot while fleeing the scene) is insulting to the intelligence of this court. "Despite there being no evidence presented that the number of shots was unreasonable, Plaintiff argued that the jury should award one million dollars per bullet because Loughnan and Beucler were using her for target practice." (Appellants' brief, p. 16). Contrary to that argument, the issue in the instant case is not the number of bullets, but the reasonableness of shooting at all. "Is there any evidence here that these officers assessed anything? They just started using her for target practice. She wasn't a human being to them. Target practice, that's what they used her for." (R-22-26). BETTY WILLINGHAM at the time of the shooting was a threat to no one.

The Appellants alleged that they are entitled to qualified immunity, as the facts in the instant case are analogous to *Hegarty v. Somerset County,* 53 F.3d 1367 (1st Cir. 1995), *cert. denied,* 1165 S.Ct. 675 (1995), *Roy v. Inhabitants of City of Lewiston,* 42 F.3d 691 (1st Cir. 1994), *St. Hilaire v. City of Laconia,* 71 F.3d 20 (1st Cir.

1995), *Montoute v. Carr,* 114 F.3d 181 (11th Cir. 1997) and *Nelson v. County of Wright,* 162 F.3d 986 (8th Cir. 1998) (Appellants' brief, p. 18-9) They are wrong. *Hegarty, supra,* involved a shooting where the court determined that exigent circumstances existed to enter the home of the plaintiff, who in addition to having a number of firearms was known by the officers for her violent, irrational behavior, with a history of emotional instability and demonstrated antagonism toward law enforcement officers. *Id.* at p. 1378-9. In *Roy, supra,* the plaintiff admitted lunging with knives in his hand at the time of the shooting. According to the plaintiff, his civil rights were violated since they should have subdued him by a non-lethal method. Id. at p. 693. *St. Hilaire, supra,* involved the execution of an arrest warrant of a drug dealer known to be armed and dangerous and at the time of the shooting was going for his gun. *Id.* at p. 22-3. In *Nelson, supra,* the plaintiff did not dispute that at the time of the shooting he was involved in a physical struggle during which he had reached for the officer's gun, he repeatedly hit and kicked the officer and pushed him onto the floor of the closet. *Id.,* p. 988-9. Finally, in *Montoute, supra,* the officer had heard the discharge of a shotgun, then observed the plaintiff walking or running towards him with a 12-gauge, pistol-grip, sawed-off, pump shotgun in his right hand, pointing towards the ground. The plaintiff ignored repeated orders to drop the shotgun, fled past the officer and continued to flee even after the officer fired his first shot. *Id.,* p. 183. None of the facts in the cases relied upon by the Appellants remotely resemble the evidence presented in the Appellee's case. The Appellee was not a known dangerous felon, she was not involved in a physical struggle with anyone at the time of the shooting and she had no weapon in her hand at the time of the shooting.

Betty Willingham was a model citizen with no prior history of violence or criminal activity whatsoever. The Appellee does not dispute that the incident occurred within minutes of the initial stop of her brother. However, whether the time was 95 seconds, ten seconds or one second, the only issue is what the Appellee was doing at the time she was shot. According to their own witness, Stanley Cale, Appellants BEUCLER and LOUGHNAN were specifically trained to make split second decisions. The evidence presented by the Appellee, both testimonial and physical, clearly show that at the titne [sic] of the shooting BETTY WILLINGHAM was unarmed and posed a threat to no one. Appellants failed to assess the situation, they failed to act as reasonable officers, and therefore, their conduct was in violation of clearly established law.

* * *

Supreme Court, U.S
FILED
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No. 01-1693

IN THE

Supreme Court of the United States

BETTY WILLINGHAM,

Petitioner,

v.

JAMES LOUGHNAN and BRIAN BEUCLER,

Respondents.

ON PETITION FOR A WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS FOR THE ELEVENTH CIRCUIT

REPLY BRIEF

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Petitioner, Betty Willingham, respectfully replies to Respondents' Brief in Opposition.

STATEMENT OF THE CASE

Respondents state

> [a]ccording to the officers, who testified at her criminal and civil trial, she had a long blade kitchen knife in her hand and was attempting to stab Pannuci in the back at the time she was shot. *An independent witness testified at both trials that she was on the step outside her house with an object in her hand at the time she was shot.*

(Emphasis added). Respondents' Brief, p. 1. This is a clear misstatement of the testimony and physical evidence presented at the civil trial. At the time that she was shot eight times by Respondents Beucler and Loughnan, Betty Willingham was standing in the threshold of her kitchen doorway with both her hands grasping her hair and screaming for them to "stop the dog." The dog in question was Panucci's police dog that was attacking the Petitioner's brother.

While initially charged with attempted first degree murder, the Petitioner, at the criminal trial, was convicted of attempted second degree murder, which required no specific intent and was consistent with her testimony that she had thrown one knife in the direction of Panucci's dog. It was not the Petitioner that sought to relitigate issues from the criminal trial, it was the Respondents. At the civil trial, the Respondents sought to present evidence of alleged cocaine use by the Petitioner to support their version of her alleged erratic behavior on the night of the incident. They proceeded with this alleged evidence despite the district court's warning that such evidence could properly be rebutted by the Petitioner. It was. As a result, the undisputed evidence at the civil trial was that the alleged cocaine was

sprinkled on the Petitioner's bloody gown by a member of the Boynton Beach Police Department after they had obtained it from the hospital, and that Betty Willingham was *not* under the influence of cocaine.

According to Respondents'

> [t]he Eleventh Circuit, in an unpublished opinion, affirmed the denial of the motion for summary judgment due to the claimed factual dispute of whether Plaintiff was doing nothing at the time she was shot or was attempting to murder an officer. In the panel's view, the issue preclusion argument was not properly presented for review.

(Respondents' Brief, p. 2). This is also incorrect. On August 27, 1997, during oral argument, Respondents' counsel, in response to the Court of Appeals panel's questioning the Respondents' failure to provide the criminal trial transcript to the district court or the appellate court, responded that said transcript would not assist the court in determining the basis of the criminal jury's conviction of the Petitioner. (*See* Judges' tape of oral argument in Case No. 96-4714). The Eleventh Circuit affirmed the ruling of the district court, holding that

> . . . [a]lthough appellants seek to rely upon the plaintiff's prior conviction of attempted second degree murder, we decline to address any issue of collateral estoppel or issue preclusion because the appellants did not present the criminal trial transcript to the district court in support of their motion for summary judgment, nor did they include said transcript in the record on appeal. In the absence of any issue preclusion, and in the summary judgment posture of this case, we must accept as true plaintiff's

> version of the relevant facts. According to plaintiff, she was shot when she was merely standing in the doorway of her house, screaming and pulling her hair and posing no threat to anyone. *If the officers fired on plaintiff even though she was posing no threat to anyone, they would have violated clearly-established law.*

(Emphasis added). *See* Appendix D, at 67a.

Respondents chose to not supplement the record on appeal with the criminal transcript or move for rehearing with the Eleventh Circuit. Additionally, the Respondents chose to not present the criminal trial transcript to the district court or renew their motion for summary judgment. On April 10, 1998, the jury returned a verdict in favor of the Petitioner and against Respondents Beucler and Loughnan and the City of Boynton Beach, Florida in the amount of $5,000,000 compensatory damages and individually against each Respondent in the amount of $500,000 punitive damages.

Nothing in the transcript of the criminal trial determines whether the Petitioner was convicted of attempted second degree murder of Pannucci based upon lunging or throwing a second knife as alleged by the Respondents. In fact, at no time prior to or during the trial did Respondents cite to the district court any portion of the criminal transcript where it was determined from the record that the Petitioner had been convicted for throwing a second knife. At both the criminal and civil proceedings, the Petitioner admitted to throwing two bottles and throwing one knife. At the criminal proceedings, the Petitioner was charged with attempted first degree murder of Panucci, which requires both intent and premeditation. By finding her guilty of attempted second degree murder, the criminal jury clearly based its verdict upon the admissions of the Petitioner that she had thrown two bottles and one knife.

Significantly, the district court in denying Respondents motion, stated:

> Having now had the opportunity to review the transcript of the criminal trial (to the extent available) in light of *Vasquez* and Florida law concerning collateral estoppel generally, the undersigned remains unable to conclude that Willingham's conviction necessarily resolved the question of whether the officers used unconstitutionally excessive force. Among other important distinctions, Willingham maintained in the criminal trial, just as she had in her civil trial, that she threw only one knife, and was unarmed at the time of the shooting. *Thus, although the jury found her guilty of attempted second degree murder of Panucci, the jury may have resolved the conflict in the evidence concerning whether one or two knives were thrown to be consistent with Willingham's version of the offense.* If that occurred, the jury would never have reached the issue of whether Willingham was acting in self defense and whether the officers were justified in the use of deadly force after the first knife was thrown. Thus, similar to *Vasquez, it cannot be ascertained whether Willingham's criminal trial jury ever addressed the propriety of Loughnan and Beucler's actions.*

(Emphasis added). *See* Appendix B, at 33-34a.

The district court went on to state:

> Given the conflicts in the evidence concerning the sequence of the pertinent events and the general nature of the verdict, Defendants cannot demonstrate

> that a determination that the officers were justified in shooting Willingham was a critical and necessary part of the jury's decision that Willingham attempted to kill Panucci. *Therefore, collateral estoppel and issue preclusion, did not preclude Willingham from proceeding to trial in this case.*

(Emphasis added). *See id.* at 35a.

Not only was the case law clear at that time that the conduct of the Respondents was unlawful, the testimony of the Respondents clearly shows that they knew their conduct was unlawful. They knew in 1987 that it was unlawful to shoot an unarmed person who posed a threat to no one. It was for this reason that they concocted the lies about what Petitioner was doing at the time that they shot her. Why else would they state that she was lunging off of the stoop at Officer Panucci with a knife in her hand, when in fact she was merely standing at her door pulling her hair? Why else would they plant the second knife under her body, except to justify what they knew to be an unlawful shooting? Their own testimony proves conclusively that they were aware of the law and knew that their actions were not protected under qualified immunity.

In the civil case, Stanley Williams, the eyewitness, testified that he went to the Boynton Beach Police Department on the night of the incident to complain because Respondents had shot the Petitioner for no reason. Additionally, both Petitioner's police expert *and Respondents' police expert* opined that if, at the time of the shooting, Petitioner was unarmed, then the deadly force utilized by the Respondents was inappropriate and below acceptable police standards.

I. The questions presented for review were timely raised or decided in the district or circuit court below:

The Petitioner was the Appellee in the proceedings below. In her response brief, Petitioner quoted the unpublished opinion of the Eleventh Circuit panel where they stated that "*[i]f the officers fired on plaintiff even though she was posing no threat to anyone, they would have violated clearly-established law.*" (Emphasis added). *See* Appendix. D, at 67a; Appellee's Response Brief, p. 3. In returning a verdict for the Petitioner, the civil jury determined from the evidence that the Petitioner was unarmed and posed a threat to no one at the time that she was shot by Respondents. The district court concurred with the jury verdict and the opinion of the first panel that such conduct violated clearly established law. The district court in its decision stated that with respect to grounds three (insufficiency of the evidence) and four (qualified immunity) of Respondents' Motion for Judgment as a Matter of Law, "[t]he third and fourth arguments have already been resolved by this Court, which rulings the Court adopts herein." *See* Appendix B, at 29-30a. As the appellants in the proceedings below, it was the Respondents' burden to demonstrate an exception to the law of the case. They did not do so.

II. The Eleventh Circuit's use of a "materially similar" standard in the instant case is in direct conflict with this Court's recent opinion in *Hope v. Pelzer*

In the instant case, the Court of Appeals held that

> [a]lmost always, to establish the law clearly in the context of the Fourth Amendment, *a materially similar case must have already decided that what the police officer was doing was unlawful*. . . . ('[N]o bright line exists for identifying when force

> is excessive; we have therefore concluded that unless a controlling and materially similar case declares the official's conduct unconstitutional, a defendant is usually entitled to qualified immunity.'). . . . Our own survey of the case law indicates that in 1987 it was not clearly established that it constituted excessive force to shoot a person under the circumstances presented in this case.

Willingham v. Loughnan, 261 F.3d 1178, 1187 (11th Cir. 2001).

According to Respondents, "[o]nly where there is a pre-existing, 'factually defined' case which is precisely on point can a litigant survive the defense of qualified immunity before the Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit." (Respondents' Brief, p. 5). While, this is a correct statement of the Eleventh Circuit's position with respect to qualified immunity, it is wrong in light of this Court's opinion in *Hope v. Pelzer*, 2002WL1378412 (U.S. 2002) (argued April 17, 2002).

> This rigid gloss on the qualified immunity standard, though supported by Circuit precedent, is not consistent with our cases. . . . Our opinion in *Lanier* thus makes clear that officials can still be on notice that their conduct violates established law even in novel factual circumstances. Indeed, in *Lanier*, we expressly rejected a requirement that previous cases be fundamentally similar. Although earlier cases involving fundamentally similar facts can provide especially strong support for a conclusion that the law is clearly established, they are not necessary to such a finding. The same is true of cases with materially similar facts. Accordingly, pursuant to *Lanier*, the salient question that the Court of Appeals ought to have asked is whether the state of the law

> in [1987] gave respondents fair warning that their alleged treatment of [Willingham] was unconstitutional.

Hope at p. 6. The Eleventh Circuit, in stating that the case law was not clearly established as to what constituted excessive force in 1987, ignored the fair warning provided in its prior opinion in the instant case, this Court's rulings, and several cases from the Eleventh Circuit which clearly dictate that excessive force used in similar circumstances has been determined to be not entitled to qualified immunity. Appendix D, at 67a; *Tennessee v. Garner*, 471 U.S. 1 (1985); *Clark v. Beville*, 730 F.2d 739 (11th Cir. 1984); *Fundiller v. City of Cooper City*, 777 F.2d 1436 (11th Cir. 1985); *Gilmere v. City of Atlanta, GA.*, 774 F.2d 1495 (11th Cir. 1985); *Samples v. City of Atlanta*, 846 F.2d 1328 (11th Cir. 1988); *Vazquez v. Metropolitan Dade County*, 968 F.2d 1101 (11th Cir. 1992). Additionally, the Respondents own conduct supports a finding that they knew that their conduct of shooting an unarmed woman when she was a threat to no one was unconstitutional. The planting of a second knife by the Respondents and the fabricated cocaine evidence was solely for the purpose of covering up conduct which they knew to be unlawful.

III. The law-of-the-case doctrine is applicable to the case at bar

According to Respondents, the first Circuit panel opinion

> . . . was nothing more than an opinion that IF those facts which Plaintiff claims are in dispute are the ultimate facts and that the criminal trial transcript and conviction are not considered, then there would be no entitlement to qualified immunity. . . . Petitioner does not argue that the facts were the same at the motion for summary judgment stage as at trial.

(Respondents' Brief, p. 13). At the summary judgment stage, Petitioner provided evidence that at the time of the shooting, she was unarmed and a threat to no one. At the trial, the Petitioner proved that she was unarmed and a threat to no one. In fact, the "ultimate facts" or actual facts were more chilling than what Petitioner initially presented in her response to summary judgment. At trial, the Petitioner proved that she was gunned down by the Respondents while she was unarmed and posed no threat, that they then attempted to cover up their unlawful conduct by planting a second knife and fabricating cocaine evidence by sprinkling pure cocaine on her bloody gown while it was laying on a table in the evidence room of the City of Boynton Beach Police Department. These were the actual and ultimate facts proven at the trial.

Respondents incorrectly state that "[w]hen considering the motion for summary judgement, the district court did not address clearly established law in its denial of summary judgment, nor did the Court of Appeals." (Respondents' Brief, p. 16). As the first Court of Appeals panel stated: "*If the officers fired on plaintiff even though she was posing no threat to anyone, they would have violated clearly-established law.*" (Emphasis added). Appendix. D, at 67a. The issue for the district court and the first panel of the Court of Appeals was whether the use of deadly force, under the circumstances in the instant case, was objectively reasonable under clearly established law, not whether a prior "materially similar" case, under the incorrect standards of the Eleventh Circuit had provided notice to the Respondents that such conduct was unlawful. As stated by Respondents, "[i]f the facts presented by plaintiff at the summary judgment stage become, without notable exception, the 'actual facts' as developed at trial, then the qualified immunity determination, if made at the prior appellate panel, should not be revisited." (Respondents' Brief, p. 17-18). The civil jury was properly

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instructed that, in light of the Petitioner's convictions, they "must accept these convictions as established facts in your deliberations and may not reject them or otherwise question their validity." *Willingham*, *supra* at 1185 n.10. The jury also properly found that Respondents used excessive force, as the evidence showed that, at the time of the shooting, Petitioner was a threat to no one. The evidence presented at trial support the findings by the jury that the Respondents violated the Petitioner's constitutional rights by using excessive force. The evidence also supported a finding that the constitutional right was "clearly established" at the time and precluded the defense of qualified immunity.

CONCLUSION

For the foregoing reasons and as stated in her Petition, Petitioner respectfully requests that the Court grant certiorari to the United States Court of Appeals for the Eleventh Circuit.

Respectfully submitted,

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